

# Democratization



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# Populism and the media: in the “friend” - “enemy” logic

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## What is populism?

The lack of a concept or an idea that achieves a certain consensus among academics regarding the meaning of populism seems recurring within the bibliography that studies this phenomenon. Populism is a multidimensional concept with the capacity to adapt. In most cases, that understanding is replaced by descriptions of a varied reality<sup>1</sup>.

According to Kazin<sup>2</sup> populism is a controversial and ambiguous concept. For Vallespín and Bascuñán (2017)<sup>3</sup>, it is a tricky concept that must be accepted taking into consideration its contradictions and ambiguities. For Taggart (2000)<sup>4</sup>, it is an embarrassing and elusive concept that oscillates between great meaning and fundamental conceptual variety.

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1 Ernesto Laclau, *La razón populista* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005).

2 Michael Kazin, “Trump and American Populism,” *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 6 (2016): 17–24.

3 Fernando Vallespín and Máriam M. Bascuñán, *Populismos* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2017).

4 Paul Taggart, *Populism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000).

Part of the problem has to do with its multifaceted nature. In this sense, a first intellectual strategy would be not to try to go beyond the multiplicity itself, that is, to stay within it, analyze the range of empirical cases that it addresses, and draw the conclusions that are possible from a limited and descriptive comparison between them (Laclau, 2005)<sup>5</sup>. The reason rests and is argued in the search for discursive features, political strategies and an approach to social, economic and even cultural problems shared by these actors.

According to Zanatta (2014: 9)<sup>6</sup>, "Its diversity and continuous evolution give it a unique and unrepeatable character". In the words of Barraycoa: "it is like angels: each constitutes a species in itself" (Barraycoa, 2017: 139)<sup>7</sup>. Nelly Arenas (2007)<sup>8</sup> provides a standpoint that goes beyond conceiving populism as a political strategy. The Venezuelan professor places populism within the social sciences as a category of analysis. However, she recognizes that the conceptual differences that are built around the term by different authors are significant. Therefore, its characteristics cannot be considered as tacit, immovable elements, but rather have an evolutionary character that is redefined thanks to experience, the appearance of new social phenomena, and, therefore, the adaptation of those elements and populist actors to the times.

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5 Fernando Vallespín and Máriam M. Bascuñán, *Populismos* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2017).

6 Loris Zanatta, *El populismo* (Madrid: Katz, 2014).

7 Javier Barraycoa, "El populismo en la Europa contemporánea," in *Pueblo y populismo: los desafíos políticos contemporáneos* (2017): 135-156.

8 Nelly Arenas, "El populismo de Hugo Chávez: ¿revirtiendo la democracia venezolana? (2004-2007)," *Revista Iberoamericana de Filosofía, Política y Humanidades* 22 (2007): 152-186.

However, the fact that there are common features between different populist actors does not imply the discovery of a concept or replicas with respect to populist phenomena.

Populism legitimizes itself on a number of characteristics rather than on a theoretical basis. Isaiah Berlin, cited by Zanatta (2014)<sup>9</sup>, defines the core of populism in six fundamental parts. The first is related to an idea of community, it is a community experience. The second refers to populism as an apolitical –and even antipolitical– element given that, to its supporters, social order will seem the best policy, even under an authoritarian regime. The third relates to the idea that populism gives centrality and stripped sovereignty back to the people. The fourth is related to the populist wishes to revive values of the past that could be of harmony and social equality in the collective imagination. The fifth refers to the fact that populism always wants to address the majority, and sometimes the whole. Lastly, the sixth understands that the populist phenomenon emerges in societies with a convulsed state.

#### Populism and authoritarianism

The relationship between authoritarianism and populism is perhaps one of the most obvious and consecutive realities in Latin America. It is not so clearly perceived in Europe and the United States. The word should be differentiated from political action. In other words, it is one thing to transgress the norm and even legalize the autocracy, and another thing is to maintain the functioning of democratic institutions, but to construct a message that would ultimately be undermining fundamental values of democracy.

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9 Loris Zanatta, *El populismo* (Madrid: Katz, 2014).

For some scholars, populist principles and democracy are incompatible (Lassalle, Zanatta, Waisborg, Retamozo, De la Torre)<sup>10</sup>. Populism, according to this vision, recognizes the authoritarian appropriation of the popular will by a self-proclaimed leader (beyond being elected) who is seen by his followers as the condensation of demands for rupture and promises of redemption. Furthermore, populists are anti-democratic because they construct their rivals as enemies. They must be silenced because their opinions are not part of the debate where the interests and needs of the people are discussed.

The authoritarian and caudillista discourse tries to polarize society, divide, confront. Inevitably that contradicts fundamental democratic values. The populist discourse stimulates the social division into two blocks, dichotomizes the public space and simplifies reality. And thus, one pole cannot dialogue with the other simply because the meeting ground has disappeared.

At times, frontal discourse with authoritarian features maintains a certain degree of legitimacy since it is built on denunciations of real problems in the functioning of democracy. For example, corruption in governments or bureaucracy that does not diligently solve people's daily problems, among others. The populist offer gains credibility and acceptance because it is built in part on that reality, as well as on truths anchored in public opinion and many times verifiable by citizens.

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10 José María Lassalle, *Contra el populismo* (Barcelona: Debate, 2017); Loris Zanatta, *El populismo* (Madrid: Katz, 2014); Silvio Waisborg, *Vox populista* (Madrid: Gedisa, 2014); Martín Retamozo, "Populismo en América Latina: Desde la teoría hacia el análisis político. Discurso, sujeto e inclusión en el caso Argentino", *Colombia Internacional* 82 (2014): 221–258. <https://doi.org/10.7440/colombiaint82.2014.09>; Carlos De la Torre, "Populismo y democracia," *Cuadernos Del CENDES* 27, no. 73 (2010): 171–184.

Populist hyper-leadership might be right in the denunciation, but it is so rarely in the remedy to these obvious troubles. Thus, the political discussion identifies the relationship between populism and simple promises or quick solutions, which are mostly inapplicable.

Populist legitimacy has another characteristic, which is common today. Most fall into the contradiction of assuming the rules of liberal democracy when it is precisely what they constantly criticize.

Democratic fragility in Latin America was clear at the beginning of the 20th century (Jaime Guzmán Foundation, 2016)<sup>11</sup>. Left-wing populisms conquered power through elections: Hugo Chávez in 1998, Evo Morales in 2005 and Rafael Correa in 2007. However, these elected leaders ended up implementing a “plebiscitary dictatorship”. The participation of the people was ensured through direct democracy (Weyland, 2001)<sup>12</sup>. In the end, that popular power ended up being a delegation to an authoritarian politician who took advantage of the participation mechanisms to get the people to approve his mandates. In part, they did so thanks to the excessive use of the mass media, which allowed them to strengthen their image and at the same time represent authority and order, even symbolizing the popular will. (Patiño Aristizábal, 2007)<sup>13</sup>.

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11 Jaime Guzmán Foundation, “Corrupción y fragilidad institucional en América Latina”, *Ideas & Propuestas* 213 (2016): 1-16.

12 Kurt Weyland, “Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics”, *Comparative Politics* 34, no. 1 (2001): 1-22.

13 Luis Guillermo Patiño, “Neopopulismo y comunicación en el contexto de las democracias latinoamericanas”, *Comunicación y pluralismo* 4 (2007): 89-104.

### The anti-establishment discourse

Authoritarianism is also a symptom of the legitimized discourse of the populist who reveals, explains and develops a discourse against the established system; usually worn out and with little credibility. Thus, a fundamental aspect of the dichotomy in the populist message is the confrontation against the established power. This established power can be represented by several agents: the Empire, traditional political parties, the monarchy, businessmen, private banks, the European Union, the politicians themselves, traditional institutions and also the traditional media. Said agents vary according to experience, the political history of each country or region, the socio-political context, and, of course, the populist character and phenotype that emerges in the midst of the crisis.

Populists reject these agents considered as part of "the establishment", the "political caste", the power as a rising group for not representing the "people", and for endangering their interests (De Cleen, 2017)<sup>14</sup>. In this sense, it is determined which agents belong to the establishment, and what populist actors mean by the so-called establishment. In his concept of populism collected by Máximo Leibman (2009: 4)<sup>15</sup> Gino Germani ensures that "common people confront privileged interest groups, generally considered contrary to the people and the nation".

The populist leader or actor must quickly assume a position with respect to the different agents. Next, they must define and argue their belonging to the group identified with the "people",

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14 Benjamin De Cleen, *Populism and nationalism* (Oxford University, 2017): 1-29.

15 Máximo Leibman, *La fragmentación política argentina: presidentes y antonimias* (Buenos Aires, 2010).

that is, with the “good people”. As De Cleen (2017) clarifies<sup>16</sup>, populists speak for “the common people”, “the common man”, “the man in the street”, “those from below”.

The owners of the media, journalists, and large media corporations end up being singled out as part of the anti-people; as a “caste” that looks out only for its interests, beyond the collective, as agents at the service of the bourgeoisie, of the ruling classes.

### **Populism and the media: allies and enemies**

Citizens know and understand political processes through the media. Society is largely mediated and develops its life in the post-industrial stage. “The mass production and dissemination of cultural goods occupy the central place that material goods had previously occupied in industrial society. Metallurgy, the textile industry, the chemical industry as well as the electronic industries were in industrial society what the production and dissemination of knowledge and information are in programmed society, that is, education, health and mass media” (Touraine, 2000: 254)<sup>17</sup>.

Based on this postulate and the aforementioned symbiotic relationship between media and politics, it is worth delving into a fundamental aspect of populist discourse, which has to do with a dichotomy in discourse: antagonism from a verbal perspective. A verbal and image construction that separates “friends” from “enemies” by placing said actors (“people” vs “establishment”,

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16 Benjamin De Cleen, *Populism and nationalism* (Oxford University, 2017): 1-29.

17 Alain Touraine, A. *Crítica a la modernidad* (Ciudad de México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000).



those from the "inside" vs those from the "outside") in totally irreconcilable positions (Arroyas & Fernández, 2019)<sup>18</sup>.

The media are witnesses (they offer their platforms) and actors (they are identified as enemies) of this dilemma, of this process of confrontation. In this sense, populism is aware of its dependence on the media. First, it recognizes its power to influence citizens, whether for change or for the reaffirmation of ideals or convictions. Both Trump, Farage, Tsipras, Iglesias, Marine Le Pen, Hanson in Australia and Chávez are experts in the use of the media (Block & Negrine, 2017)<sup>19</sup>.

The hyperconnectivity, the excess of information, the oversizing in social networks about the real and the hypervocalization of citizens, generates an important media awareness from populism. Chávez himself (Bikel, 2008)<sup>20</sup>, upon his release from prison in 1994, stated: "The media have a fundamental priority for us because they are a weapon for the ideological struggle and a weapon to tell the people about all the expectations we have".

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18 Enrique Arroyas Langa and Victoria Fernández Ilundain, "The politics of authenticity in populist discourse: rhetorical analysis of a parliamentary speech by Podemos" in *Populist Discourse. Critical Approaches to Contemporary Politics*, ed. Encarnación Hidalgo-Tenorio (Londres: Routledge, 2019), 17-32.

19 Elena Block and Ralph Negrine, "The Populist Communication Style: Toward a Critical Framework," *International Journal of Communication* 11 (2017): 178-197.

20 Ofra Bikel, The Hugo Chávez Show [Television series episode]. In Fanning, D. (Executive Producer), PBS Frontline. T27, Ep 4. Estados Unidos: WGBH-TV (2008). Retrived from: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/hugochavez/>

## The media as enemies of the people

The populist actor understands that to achieve their objectives they must necessarily establish a confrontation with those editorial lines that threaten or contradict their principles. In this “fight for the truth”, populism recognizes that opinion leaders and large media corporations guide the agenda of public opinion, and therefore have a direct impact on citizen conversation.

The fundamental reason why populism perceives the media as enemies is that they also act as intermediary institutions between citizens and political power, reflecting the political plurality and heterogeneity of a community. That is, and as seen in the first chapter, they are actors who harm the construction of the homogeneous identity that populism pursues. Basically, they represent a threat to national identity. Consequently, they belong to the “caste” (position of Podemos), to the “establishment” (position of Trump), to the “empire” (position of Chávez), to the “power mafia” (position of López Obrador).

Curtailing freedom of expression and limiting independent media spaces is typical of some populist actors. Once the medium is removed, the vacant space is not left free but is occupied by those platforms or media servile to the populist. What is ultimately sought is not simply to silence a voice but to replace it by another that appears to be critical.

Paraphrasing the Libertador, Simón Bolívar, Chávez (2010)<sup>21</sup> came to remember part of his thought: “Bolívar said it: the first of all forces is not the cannons, not the tanks, not the bombers,

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21 Chávez highlights the importance of public opinion (2010, April 11). TeleSURtv. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5jWqMQFqCM>

it is the force of public opinion". More recently, Steve Bannon (Pereda, 2017)<sup>22</sup> recognized in the media, not only a mediator who shapes reality to manipulate the truth of President Trump's administration, but also a political actor: "The media should be embarrassed and humiliated and keep its mouth shut and just listen for a while (...) You're the opposition party. Not the Democratic Party. You're the opposition party. The media is the opposition party".

From this point, which frames and represents some of the confrontations of populist leaders in Latin America, Europe and now the United States, the populist actor sets out to fight a "battle for the truth", a struggle assumed by disadvantaged populism and under the symptoms of the victim. Populism concludes that media systems, dominated by the powers, are inevitably contrary to the interests of the people. In this context, it draws a world where it is at a communicational disadvantage and is a vulnerable subject in the face of media corporations. In addition, the people is the eternal victim of an information block perpetrated by its enemies (Waisborg, 2014)<sup>23</sup>.

The populist actor takes action and strives to fight a communicational fight:

The opposition of the private media to these governments is notorious, as is the reaction of the latter who seek to configure some type of media that is loyal to them. Thus, a couple of political actors who are open to the facts appear,

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22 Cristina Pereda, El principal asesor de Trump dice que los medios "deberían mantener la boca cerrada". El País (2017, January 29). Retrieved from: [https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/01/26/estados-unidos/1485466794\\_287171.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/01/26/estados-unidos/1485466794_287171.html)

23 Silvio Waisborg, *Vox populista* (Madrid: Gedisa, 2014).

but who are shrouded from the institutional point of view (that is, they are not openly assumed as actors working for a certain position): on the one hand, the hegemonic media as opposition; on the other, the state or private media linked to the state, which act as pro-government media (Follari, 2013: 10)<sup>24</sup>. "The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @CNN, @NBCNews and many more) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American people. SICK!" the president posted on Twitter. He soon deleted the tweet and posted a revised message that called out ABC and CBS as well.

On February 17, 2017, the President of the United States, Donald Trump posted on his Twitter account: "The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @NBCNews, @ABC, @CBS, @CNN and many mor) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American People!" (Twitter account @realdonaldtrump, 2017). An investigation published by The New York Times (2017)<sup>25</sup> collects some of Trump's statements and criticisms of the media, considering only less than two months since his administration took office:

And I want you all to know that we are fighting the fake news. It's fake – phony, fake. (...) When the media lies to people, I will never ever let them get away with it. I will do whatever I can that they don't get away with it. They have their own agenda, and their agenda is not your agenda (points to the public) (...) Unfortunately much of the media in Washington,

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24 Roberto Follari, "Medios, populismo y poder en América Latina", *Íconos Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 17, no. 2 (2013): 9-13.

25 Donald Trump, El discurso inaugural completo de Donald Trump, con análisis y comentarios. The New York Times (2017). Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2017/01/20/el-discurso-inaugural-completo-de-donald-trump-con-analisis-y-comentarios/>

D.C., along with New York, Los Angeles in particular, speaks not for the people, but for the special interests and for those profiting off a very, very obviously broken system. The press has become so dishonest that if we don't talk about it, we are doing a tremendous disservice to the American people. Tremendous disservice. (...) The media is a very, very dishonest weapon and we will see what happens. Not all of them, and I have to say, I always clarify that not all of them (...) It's happening. We are getting to the point where things are not reported, and in many cases the dishonesty of the press does not want to report it (...) In a large group of media, dishonesty, deception, and deceit make them the opposition political party. The media is a disgrace and I have been badly rated from the beginning. The New York Times has rated me badly from the beginning".

Trump links the press with the political establishment. On the other hand, it assumes that the work of that press threatens the homogeneous unity of the American people.

On February 24, 2017, the White House press secretary, Sean Spicer, decides not to hold the usual daily press conference and in turn summons journalists to a meeting without the presence of cameras. This implied the prohibition of the entry of some media to said meeting, such as The New York Times, CNN, Politico and the Los Angeles Times. The reactions were immediate from these media claiming that it was another attack from the Trump administration to the press. The executive editor of The New York Times, Dean Baquet, assured for a piece by journalists Davis and Grynbaum (2017)<sup>26</sup>: "Nothing like this has

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Grynbaum and Julie Hirschfeld, Trump Intensifies His Attacks on Journalists and Condemns F.B.I. 'Leakers'. The New York Times (2017,

ever happened at the White House in our long history of covering multiple administrations of different parties. We strongly protest the exclusion of The New York Times and the other news organizations. Free media access to a transparent government is obviously of crucial national interest”.

In Trump’s case, they do not even deny the strategy and even the need to establish a political dispute in terms of a battle, which includes cutting off spaces and excluding.

The president of Ecuador until 2017, Rafael Correa, maintained a tense relationship with the media during his ten years in office. In an interview with the TVE medium and the journalist Ana Pastor (2012)<sup>27</sup>, he stated: “The media are one of the great planetary problems. Private businesses dedicated to mass communication, dedicated to providing a public good, fundamental for societies, that is a basic contradiction (...) I think there should be more public media, more community media that do not have that conflict: profit and mass communication. When a medium belongs to the bank, what do you think will prevail? The private interest or the public interest?” (own translation).

To avoid early disappointment with populist promises, the leader identifies the adversaries; the political dynamics itself would not allow it to carry out everything that is proposed in a short time, which inevitably puts its legitimacy at risk before the people who yearn for change. To the extent that these promises

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February 24). Retrieved from: [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/24/us/politics/white-house-sean-spicer-briefing.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/24/us/politics/white-house-sean-spicer-briefing.html?_r=0)

27 Rafael Correa and Ana Pastor, Rafael Correa vapulea a Anita Pastor en Los Desayunos de TVE. HRW cartel de Sinaloa. Bancos. Cuba [video archive]. sucreranda Hugo Chávez Venezuela (2012). Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMQEvZ4itoo&t=1065s>

are not kept, it will be easier to hold the adversary responsible for the breach. The same could happen from political action in the opposition, not necessarily from the government. This is how Hernández Velasco explained it (2017)<sup>28</sup> in *El Mundo*:

Marine Le Pen doesn't care about having the vast majority of the media against her. Rather the other way around: she almost appreciates it. Like Donald Trump, the leader of the National Front (FN) has found the perfect channel to reach the general public, to convey her messages and political slogans, and, at the same time, avoid the criticism and attacks launched against her by numerous newspapers and TV channels. Their secret weapon is social media (...) Traditional media, also in highly civic and cultured France, are facing increasing discredit. They are victims of the same recurring complaints that are launched against politicians: that they live in a parallel reality, that they do not speak the language of the people, that they have shady interests in mind, that they constitute an elite that helps to perpetuate the system settled down (own translation).

The confrontation with the media is then for the populist leader a primary and simple way of facing the problem. The most difficult, but in the end the most profitable, which is the generation of consensus, is thus far from what the populist leader does and also from what Mouffe already raised about the associative society that was explained in the first chapter.

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28 Irene Hernández Velasco, "El arma secreta de Marine Le Pen", *El Mundo* (2017, April 25). Retrieved from: <https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2017/04/25/58f892cb22601d1f5f8b463a.html>

If politics is recognized in principle as conflict, then the confrontational attitude of the populist leader is logical. In the same interview with Ana Pastor cited above, Correa was restrictive:

Much more important than building roads, hospitals, schools, is building the truth. Lies have destroyed Latin America, there is too much lying (...) please, get down now, demolish those myths, those stereotypes of evil politicians persecuting poor journalists and poor media. It's the other way around. Those agents, those media are the ones that have supported the dictatorships, the ones that have kept quiet about the repressions, about the bank robberies, and they are the ones that persecute the governments that really want to change things (own translation).

The former Ecuadorian president ratifies what Chávez preached from Bolívar. Many things can be done, problems can be solved, even fulfilling the promises of the most difficult campaigns, but if behind all the management there is no construction of communicational elements that allow the legitimacy and sustenance of the majority, it will do little good.

*Podemos* considers the private media as part of its political enemies: "What attacks freedom of expression is the existence of private media (...) If two billionaires own what can be read, what can be heard and what that you can see, that is a risk...That is the duopoly or oligopoly" (Iglesias, 2019).



Le Pen (2017)<sup>29</sup> repeats a similar pattern from ideological antipodes. "They hysterically campaign for protégé Emmanuel Macron. They shout defending the freedom of the press when they are criticized and whine for having lost the trust of the people".

Being in the government or in the opposition is irrelevant regarding the analysis. The strategy and construction is the same.

#### The media as allies of the people

Populism needs the media, even those identified as enemies, to achieve its political ends (Ward, 2019)<sup>30</sup>. And vice versa, the media also take advantage of populist discourse insofar as it is an instrument at the service of the news that moves emotions (Espírito Santo & Figuerias, 2019)<sup>31</sup>, in other words, because it allows them to sell controversies. Feelings end up dominating public debate (Arroyo & Fernández, 2019)<sup>32</sup>. The clearest confession of this interested exploitation is found in the statements of the executive director of the American television network CBS, Leslie Moonves

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29 Le Pen, on the media: 'Hacen campaña de manera histérica por Macron'. (2017, February 27). La Gaceta. Retrieved from: <https://gaceta.es/noticias/le-pen-los-medios-campana-manera-histerica-macron-27022017-1420/>

30 Stephen Ward, *Ethical journalism in a populist age*, (Londres: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc, 2019).

31 Paula Espírito Santo and Rita Figueiras, "Populism and the media factor: a comparative perspective on the Portuguese presidential candidate," in *Populist Discourse. Critical Approaches to Contemporary Politics*, ed. Encarnación Hidalgo-Tenorio (London: Routledge, 2019), 65-80.

32 Enrique Arroyas Langa and Victoria Fernández Ilundain, "The politics of authenticity in populist discourse: rhetorical analysis of a parliamentary speech by Podemos," in *Populist Discourse. Critical Approaches to Contemporary Politics*, ed. Encarnación Hidalgo-Tenorio (Londres: Routledge, 2019), 17-32.

(2016)<sup>33</sup>, who stated: “Trump may not be good for the United States, but he is good for CBS”.

Thus, and given the existence of media factors that could be adverse to the lines of populist governments and that put into question the action of the populist actor, they resort to the opening of new media, with an editorial line that sometimes becomes more political propaganda than informational content. This reality is much clearer in the use of public media, of the State, once the populist comes to power. Media trenches are established to defend against corporate domination of the media. Regardless of how long they have been in power, inequality will recur, it will never end. This narrative works to justify policies considered necessary to transform the present order (Waisborg, 2014)<sup>34</sup>.

Beyond the Venezuelan case, which will be discussed later, the case of the populist left can be cited in the figures of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, both former presidents of Argentina. Both were great allies of Hugo Chávez. Their constant fight with Grupo Clarín<sup>35</sup> began once the government decided to promote Law 26,522 on Audiovisual Communication Services,

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33 Paul Bond, Leslie Moonves on Donald Trump: “It May Not Be Good for America, but It’s Damn Good for CBS. The Hollywood Reporter, (2016, February 29). Retrieved from: <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/leslie-moonves-donald-trump-may-871464>

34 Silvio Waisborg, *Vox populista* (Madrid: Gedisa, 2014).

35 Grupo Clarín’s investments in Argentina in the last 20 years have been very significant; always with a central mission: journalism and the media. Their activities contributed to the configuration of an important Argentine cultural industry and generate qualified and genuine employment. Its vision and business model emphasize investing, producing, informing and entertaining while preserving Argentine values and identity, taking care of business independence as a reinsurance for journalism. (<http://www.grupoclarin.com.ar/institucional/origen-evolucion>)

popularly known as *Ley de Medios*, which certainly threatened Grupo Clarín's position of media dominance.

According to Repoll (2010: 51)<sup>36</sup>: "Adding up only these three major categories -'government management' (38 headlines), 'corruption' (24 headlines) and 'the government's relationship with the media' (18 headlines)-, all denouncing or questioning the national government, 64% (80) of 124 titles on the main Clarín cover story are against the government, thus generating a markedly negative image of the presidential administration of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner".

Among the complaints made by Clarín, the provisions of the law on the possession and use of licenses are addressed. In this case, the number of licenses established was less than the number already owned by Grupo Clarín. Therefore, inevitably, Clarín would have to appeal for the divestment. The *Ley de Medios* was approved, which was a setback for Grupo Clarín and the need for this media emporium to abolish television and radio licenses.

The law sought to limit the power of Grupo Clarín and restrict its performance. As a result, the ruling party managed to get the media group to get rid of 260 broadcasting licenses (Waisborg, 2014)<sup>37</sup>. In this way, in the case of the Kirchners in Argentina, the struggle for political power not only focused on occupying spaces of power in the government and in other instances, but also on occupying media spaces that would allow the government to limit the action of political enemies.

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<sup>36</sup> Jerónimo Repoll, "Política y medios de comunicación en Argentina. Kirchner, Clarín y la ley", *Andamios* 7, no. 14, (2010): 35-67.

<sup>37</sup> Silvio Waisborg, *Vox populista* (Madrid: Gedisa, 2014)

The case of Rafael Correa in Ecuador has other connotations:

The state activism of President Correa has been strongly resisted by the private media out of their own interests, almost always protected by the appeal to an all-embracing “freedom of the press”. The Correa government in 2012 stipulated a minimum wage floor for press workers, which also affected the private media (...) The government has not known how to involve civil society in its confrontation with private media owners, not even workers in the sector. For this reason, it has established a lot of official propaganda in the media controlled by the State, in a policy that, by not involving social actors, becomes somewhat “de-democratizing” (Follari, 2013: 12)<sup>38</sup>.

According to Waisborg (2014)<sup>39</sup>, the Ecuadorian case with regards to Correa coincides with Chávez’s Venezuela in terms of the appropriation/purchase of media with public resources. When Correa won the presidency, the State owned only Radio Nacional de Ecuador; by mid-2012, the State had almost 20 communication media, including television, radio and written press.

The case of Evo Morales in Bolivia has not had as great an impact as it has in Ecuador. However, policies were also applied against the private media, and community media were created for the communication policy of the Government of Evo Morales. This was the case of the National Radio System for Native Peoples (RPO’s). According to official data from 2011, they gathered more than 40 stations in AM and FM, and planned to open 60 more. The Venezuelan Government provided technical and financial

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38 Roberto Follari, “Medios, populismo y poder en América Latina”, *Íconos Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 17, no. 2 (2013): 9-13.

39 Silvio Waisborg, *Vox populista* (Madrid: Gedisa, 2014).

support for the purchase of equipment (...) Also, the stations are owned by indigenous communities but the Government maintained ownership (...) For Morales, this project aims to give "a voice to those who do not have a voice ", and promote "bottom-up communication"<sup>40</sup>.

Before addressing the specific case of Hugo Chávez with respect to the elements that have been described, a theoretical framework is presented with respect to the populism-internet relationship.

### **Internet as a threat and as an opportunity for populism**

Faced with the disruption of information technologies, populism faced the same dilemma as the traditional media. On the one hand, it posed a greater risk because the broadcasting capacity is potentially unlimited, which runs counter to the claims of homogenizing the collective demands of populism. On the Internet, each individual has an open speaker for the world. However, it was soon observed that the development of social networks promoted selective exposure, information bubbles were created and mobilization was enhanced, although not so much persuasion. The main social networks adapted well to populist discourse, where simple and brief responses to complex, emotional, spasmodic problems predominated, and where the image prevailed over the argument. For this reason, the populists took advantage of the digital environment to capture the disenchantment of the population and turn it into a potential supporter.

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<sup>40</sup> Waisborg, *Vox populista*.

In addition, social networks not only served as the perfect sounding board for any extremist leadership or party but also allowed them to address their potential voters directly, without the media filter (Hernández Velasco, 2017)<sup>41</sup>. For example, the American consultant and writer Rob Salkowitz (2017)<sup>42</sup> affirmed that Twitter had been a fundamental instrument of communication with the world for the election of Donald Trump. From the beginning of his term, the American president can unleash his followers against his opponents, including Republicans, if they do not follow the line of his political agenda.

In an administration like Donald Trump's, where one of its main opponents has been precisely the media, Twitter represents a tool that allows to bypass the regular filters that the media have, taking into account their opinion leaders, editorial lines and respective economic and political interests. Political strategist Roger Stone claimed:

I think the social media campaign, the alternative media campaign, was built out of necessity. It improved with the arrival of Steve Bannon to the campaign. He has a superior knowledge of alternative media, combined with the fact that he is something of an adventurer and a revolutionary, a person who can think outside the box. He was the perfect person at the perfect time. If you look at Trump's messages in the last three weeks, they are almost perfect. They are the

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41 Irene Hernández Velasco, "El arma secreta de Marine Le Pen", *El Mundo* (2017, April 25). Retrieved from: <https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2017/04/25/58f892cb22601d1f5f8b463a.html>

42 Rob Salkowitz "Trump's 20 million twitter followers get smaller under the microscope. *Forbes*" (2017, January 17). Retrieved from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/robsalkowitz/2017/01/17/trumps-20-million-twitter-followers-get-smaller-under-the-microscope/#7d90fbba4407>

forgotten Americans appealing to the silent majority. It's us against them (Kirk et al., 2017)<sup>43</sup>.

Trump is a current example of the populist leader who, within that battle with the media, appeals to directly influence, not only his own electorate but also the international news agenda, through social networks.

A study published by El País (Viejo & Alonso, 2018)<sup>44</sup> analyzed the exponential growth in the last quarter of 2018 of two political forces classified by some as populists: *Vox* and *Podemos*. The report analyzes, among other things, six digital platforms: Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter, as well as visits on the web. The case of Vox is significant: "At the beginning of 2018 it was the fourth most visited political formation after PSOE, Ciudadanos and Podemos. They only surpassed PP. In September, before the event in Madrid with 9,000 supporters, they surpassed all with 223,017 visits. And in October, coinciding with the rally, they tripled: 612,658".

The second element of analysis is Instagram. Here, Vox capitalizes better on followers:

Vox is the political party with the most followers on Instagram. It is the network that has grown the most in 2018, according to the latest report from the Association for Digital

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43 Michael Kirk, Mike Wiser; Philip Bennett; Jim Gilmore, Gabrielle Schoender, Trump's Road to the White House [Television series episode]. In Aronson-Rath, R. (Executive Producer), PBS Frontline. T35, Ep 7. United States: WGBH-TV (2017).

44 Manuel Viejo y Antonio Alonso, "La estrategia de Vox en redes sociales: ya es el primer partido en Instagram, la plataforma con más jóvenes", *El País* (2018, December 16). Retrieved from: [https://elpais.com/politica/2018/12/12/actualidad/1544624671\\_005462.html](https://elpais.com/politica/2018/12/12/actualidad/1544624671_005462.html)

Communication in Spain, as well as the most used by users between 16 and 30 years old. Its account opened in April 2016. The flag, the unity of Spain, and the Catalan independentists are present from day one. The photos are simple, unedited, seeking to attract the youngest voter: "Student! Don't give up on Selectividad, with your study you are already rendering a great service to Spain." The most successful content is a video attacking Podemos: "We don't want the Podemites, Bolivarians, and Communists to like us. We have come to represent #EspañaViva".

In the case of WhatsApp, the study reveals that "it is the most used social network in Spain. The formation of Santiago Abascal used this channel during the Andalusian elections to launch massive messages instantly". After starting in June 2018 and in just days they gained 2,000 users. Today, political organizations keep these numbers secret.

In the final part of the study, observations are made about the management of social networks by Jair Bolsonaro, the so-called "Brazilian Trump", a right-wing populist leader. The journalist from the same media outlet, Tom Avendaño, reviews how Bolsonaro bypassed the legal filters of television advertising and developed them for the Facebook platform, where he had more than 8 million followers. And he adds: "He also relied on the other great Brazilian platform: WhatsApp. In that country of 147 million voters, 120 use the app daily, most up to 30 times a day. Suddenly, 81% of his voters used the tool, compared to 59% of his great rival in the elections, Fernando Haddad, according to the Datafolha institute". In this way, thanks to the development of a direct contact strategy, he was able to reach audiences in a massive way. Avendaño affirms that the line followed by Bolsonaro



responds to the one Trump used in 2016: "saturate the messaging market. In the case of the Republican politician (Trump), they managed to make 50,000 daily variations of each ad according to the information they obtained from each of the millions of users on Facebook" (Viejo & Alonso, 2018)<sup>45</sup>.

## Conclusion

Without an enemy, there is no people. For populism, it is not possible to build the notion of the people if, first and above all, the enemies, the anti-people, are not defined. The people will understand each other only to the extent that their enemies are understood. Therefore, its unity and homogeneity are built from what precisely threatens these two apparently virtuous conditions. More important than defining who makes up this people, first and perhaps enough will be to define the agents that threaten them. Once that happens, the populist's "good people" will be built.

In this sense, and based on the fact that populism will continue in force as long as the enemies have legitimacy, the media will not cease to have visibility and prominence in the confrontation that populism engages and proposes. Even in a totalitarian system, where the media could be hijacked, those media enemies will then be foreigners. For example, in left-wing Latin American populism, Fox News, CNN, among others.

Finally, the battle that populism proposes against the media poses several dilemmas for the owners. Being victims of populist power, the editorial lines could find themselves in the obligation -by an instinct of defense and survival- to further politicize their

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<sup>45</sup> Ídem.

contents, to seek alliances in the party ranks with agents opposed to power and to accept the confrontation with populism. The risk, ultimately, results in a partisanship of the medium, a loss of meaning in the purpose that naturally corresponds to it (to inform), and in a suitable place for politics to only develop on the television set, in the radio booths, and in the opinion columns, no longer in the street and in the headquarters of political parties.

## Conclusions

One of the purposes of *Democratization* is to manifest our intellectual work and contribute to the national and international political debate. Those of us who work in this editorial project are historically woken and, with humility, we place our reflections and findings at the service of all. Frequently, when studying other political processes, I value with special admiration the stories of those who stopped to think “on the spot” about the reality that they had to live. These documents have been especially helpful to me in discovering the social and political humor of complex and sobering moments. I am sure that the time will come when it will be necessary to study the Venezuelan political process and I hope that this initiative will contribute to such purposes.

This issue includes articles that follow up on two topics that we identified as important in previous issues and that deserve our attention: the concepts of "autocratic learning" and "transformation". The first refers to the path of authoritarian improvement that the Chavista revolution has crossed since 1998. It describes the accumulation of experiences that has allowed it to grow in resilience and overcome deep crises. Recognizing these dynamics can allow to anticipate decisions and reactions with the aim of disturbing the comfort of a regime that looks like teflon, because everything is slipping. The longevity of the Chavista dictatorship forces us to continue delving into this issue. I can see that it will be necessary for the medium term to precisely analyze the political process that began on January 23, 2019, to see what the regime has learned during this period. There remains a debt in intellectual analysis and in the exercise of politics: democratic

learning. It will also be convenient to stop and ponder over what this struggle has taught those of us who resist the dictatorship.

The second concept is that of transformation. In Venezuela, people started talking about transition in 2014. The massive protests that took place in the country that year introduced the term to public opinion. Seven years separate us from that moment and we have not yet managed to achieve political change. Defining when a transition starts is a complex task. There are seldom milestones that mark change. Generally, this precision corresponds to the authors who later approach the phenomenon to study it. It is often even difficult to reach consensus around that detail. In Spain, for example, there are those who say that the transition began with the murder of Carrero Blanco; others, with the death of Franco, and some, with the Law of Political Reform. In Chile, the dissensions are greater. In my studies I locate the beginning of the transition in the promulgation of the 1980 Constitution, because that document –lacking in legitimacy– contains the mechanisms to which the Democrats turned to advance towards freedom. Nonetheless, some authors place it in the referendum of 1980. What I want to say with this is that we are still in the eye of the storm, and only once it has settled will we be able to establish milestones to describe what we experienced.

What we can see in the midst of the storm is the dimension of the damage left by the autocratic wake of the Chavista revolution. If in 2014 we began to talk about transition, in 2020 it is convenient to start reflecting in terms of transformation. The destruction of Chavismo is so profound that it requires broad levels of reconstruction. Does this demand of reality mean that liberation must be achieved through rupture? No. A transformation can be initiated by means of an agreed liberation

or by rupture. Let us remember Germany in two moments: 1945 and 1989. There is no relationship between transformation and the genre of political change. What can make a difference is the deliberate transformative disposition of those leading the process. That is what we encourage with the contributions offered by the development of this concept in Venezuela.