PART I

What Populists Want
Motivational and Emotional Factors in Populism

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POPULISM AND THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF GRIEVANCE[1]

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> *To have a grievance is to have a purpose in life. A grievance can almost serve as a substitute for hope: and it not infrequently happens that those who hunger for hope give their allegiance to him who offers them a grievance.*
>
> Eric Hoffer (1955)
> *The Passionate State of Mind: And Other Aphorisms*

The redress of citizen grievances is a core task facing any governmental system. It is so central to participatory democracy that the right to it is enshrined in its canonical founding documents, including the Magna Carta and the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Governments develop elaborate systems of laws and courts to allow ordinary people to seek redress of their grievances, against both their government and their fellow citizens, and the time, effort, and sometimes even blood involved in developing, nurturing, and defending these systems is testament to the importance people attach to the promotion and maintenance of justice in their everyday lives (see also Bar-Tal & Magal; Kruglanski et al.; Marcus; and Petersen et al., this volume).

Populist movements see the people and the elite in an antagonistic struggle, with ordinary citizens portrayed as exploited for the benefit of a privileged few (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Rather than simply offering policies to improve the lot of everyday people, populist politics infuses its messaging with an explicitly moral tone (see also Krekó, this volume). The people are portrayed as inherently good, a force of purity and wisdom, whose voice is ignored or repressed by a corrupt elite that wields its political, economic, and cultural power in service of its own self-preservation and enrichment. The power of populism as a political strategy comes from elevating feelings of grievance to the raison d'être

of the movement, harnessing the desire for justice deprived into a clarion call for political and, quite often, extra-political action.

But why are appeals to grievance an attractive political strategy? Why do populist leaders so often choose messages of blame and retribution over messages of hope, and what are the effects of feelings of grievance on political thinking and action?

The key to understanding grievance politics generally, and populist political movements more specifically, is understanding the psychology that underlies them. Accordingly, the focus of this chapter is to lay out a social psychological analysis of the concept of grievance, our preoccupation with it, how feelings of past injustice affect people's moral calculus, and how these effects in turn toxify intergroup relationships (see also Hogg & Gøetsche-Astrup, this volume). We suggest that political actors who adopt a populist strategy seek to capitalize on the psychology of grievance to mobilize and galvanize political support, but that this strategy has the important political sequalae of legitimizing extra-political action and escalating political conflict.

Mobilization and Moralization

A central goal of politics is mobilization. To gain power, through election or any other means, politicians need people to do more than just agree with them. People have to be motivated to support you, and to act in ways that support you, such as voting, volunteering, organizing, or protesting.

One way to motivate political action is to moralize it. Bauman and Skitka (2009) define moral conviction as the subjective assessment that one's attitude about a specific issue or situation is associated with one's core moral beliefs and fundamental sense of right and wrong. Although associated with the perceived importance of the attitude (Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005), feeling morally convicted about an issue has unique and important psychological and behavioral effects beyond those of just feeling an issue is important. Compared to non-moral attitudes, moral attitudes are likely to be experienced as universal truths that should apply to everyone, regardless of circumstance or cultural differences (Goodwin & Darley, 2008, 2010; Skitka et al., 2005). Moral attitudes are also strongly associated with intense emotions, such as disgust or anger, more so than even strong non-moral attitudes (Skitka et al., 2005). Perhaps most importantly, merely construing an attitude as moral increases its strength, leading to greater attitude-behavior correspondence and greater resistance to persuasion (Luttrell, Petty, Briñol, & Wagner, 2016; Van Bavel, Packer Haas, & Cunningham, 2012). For example, analyses of the 2000 and 2004 U.S. presidential elections indicate that strong moral convictions about the candidates and the issues of the day uniquely predicted self-reported voting behavior (for both Democrats and Republicans), controlling for a host of other factors (e.g., attitude strength and

strength of party identification; Skitka & Bauman, 2008; see also Feldman; and Huddy & Del Ponte, this volume).

Because moral conviction fuels political engagement, many politicians encourage citizens to moralize political issues to mobilize collective action. Marietta (2008) contends that politicians often use "sacred rhetoric" to frame issues in terms of nonnegotiable moral values rather than pragmatic assessments of costs and benefits. Morally framed messages tend to contain strong emotional language, which appeals to audiences that are likely to share the same emotional response to a given issue (Brady, Wills, Jost, Tucker, & Van Bavel, 2017; Kreps & Monin, 2011). In the context of populist politics, using the simple, intuitive language of moral right and wrong, rather than technical policy-centric cost–benefit analyses, may also appeal to the populist's desire to align themselves with the values and vernacular of the everyday people they claim to champion.

Given these benefits of moral framing, it is no wonder that politicians often try to use it to their advantage (see also Cooper & Avery, this volume). It is important to note, however, that the benefits of moral framing do not come without costs. Individuals who hold attitudes with moral conviction show greater intolerance of people with opposing viewpoints, report less desire to interact with them (Skitka et al., 2005), and hold more positive feelings about their political ingroup and greater animosity toward, and even dehumanization of, political outgroup members (Pacilli, Roccato, Pagliaro, & Russo, 2016; Ryan, 2014). Thus, moralization as a political tool has the dual effects of mobilizing collective action by binding political subgroups together in celebration and defense of a shared moral vision, and driving a wedge between subgroups by highlighting the value differences that separate them, degrading political discourse and hampering attempts by the subgroups to negotiate and compromise (Haidt, 2012; Skitka, Hanson, Morgan, & Wisneski, in press). The collateral costs of moralization as a political strategy will be a major focus of our analyses of grievance politics moving forward.

What Is Grievance?

In the lecture hall, this video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=meiU6TxysCg, TED Blog Video, 2013) always provokes a huge laugh. Part of an early TED talk, the clip begins with Frans de Waal, the famous primatologist and moral psychologist, introducing his seminal series of experiments with Sarah Brosnan (Brosnan & de Waal, 2003), in which two capuchin monkeys, side by side in adjoining cages, are in turn offered a reward for performing a simple task. In the crucial condition shown in the video clip, the first monkey performs the task happily for a piece of cucumber. She (female capuchins most clearly show the effect; Brosnan & de Waal, 2014) then watches a second monkey perform the same task, but be rewarded with a grape (a more desirable food item for capuchin monkeys). The fun comes when the task is rerun and the first monkey is again offered a

cucumber rather than a grape as reward. In contrast to her calm acceptance of the watery gourd the first time around, this time the response is visible anger to the proffered cucumber, immediately throwing it back at the experimenter and violently shaking the cage in protest. In a closing quip, de Waal notes the similarity between the capuchin monkeys' behavior and the Occupy Wall Street protests that were at that time ongoing in New York City.

We describe this video because it captures poignantly the phenomenon of grievance and the kind of response it typically generates. The dictionary definition of grievance is "a real or imagined wrong or other cause for complaint or protest, especially unfair treatment" (Dictionary.com, n.d.). Grievance, in other words, is the sense that one has been wronged somehow, that outcomes are not being distributed in a fair and equitable way, that oneself or one's group has been discriminated against or taken advantage of. One can feel aggrieved personally or as a function of one's membership in a group that has received unfair treatment, and the sense of grievance can refer to a specific unfair act, like watching another receive more reward for the same act than you yourself did, or it can refer to a more diffuse sense of generalized injustice, a feeling that oneself or one's group has historically been subjected to unfair treatment in the past.

The idea that people have a fundamental concern with issues of fairness and justice in everyday life is by no means new. Research on equity theory (e.g., DeScioli, Massenkoff, Shaw, Petersen, & Kurzban, 2014), procedural justice (Clay-Warner, 2001), and belief in a just world (Callan, Ellard, & Nicol, 2006) are all based on the notion that justice concerns are a central feature of social thought and behavior. Justice concerns are also a central dynamic of the Kohlbergian view of moral development (e.g., Kohlberg, 1975) and remain an important aspect of lay morality in more pluralistic models of moral judgment (Gilligan, 1982; Graham et al., 2013; Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1987). Cross-cultural research suggests that concerns about fairness and justice are effectively universal in human populations (Henrich et al., 2001), and while advantaged inequity aversion (i.e., discomfort that one is getting more than one deserves relative to others) seems largely restricted to humans (Brosnan & de Waal, 2014; and perhaps chimpanzees, Brosnan, Talbot, Ahlgren, Lambeth, & Shapiro, 2010), the disadvantaged inequity aversion demonstrated by Brosnan and de Waal's capuchin monkeys has been found in numerous species (Brosnan & de Waal, 2014), and thus the propensity to experience feelings of grievance seems deeply embedded in human evolutionary history.

Important for our purposes here, grievance is a distinctly moral phenomenon. Theoretically, feelings of grievance should not be experienced in response to just any negative outcome, particularly a negative outcome that is perceived as just and deserved. People should only feel aggrieved when the negative outcome is perceived as unjust and undeserved, that is, when the outcome is perceived as not just disappointing but morally wrong. Grievance involves a moral evaluation of one's state as fair (morally good) or unfair (morally bad), and evokes a

prototypically moral response (anger and outrage rather than the disappointment or self-criticism one feels after poor achievement in an ability context). Although feelings of grievance should be expected to be most intense when the unfair treatment happens to the self (more on this soon), humans also show many examples of grievance experienced in response to the unfair treatment of others—e.g., an unaffected member of a stigmatized group feeling aggrieved for the mistreatment of other members of the group—and even in response to the mistreatment of outgroup members. The substantial participation of White Americans in the recent series of Black Lives Matter protests would seem a good example of other-focused grievance.

Finally, the Brosnan and de Waal (2003) experiment is also important as an elegant illustration of how feelings of grievance can be harnessed to moralize and thus energize responses to a given situation. Initially, Brosnan and de Waal's capuchin subjects responded with equanimity to the cucumber reward. They might have hoped for more than a tasteless vegetable as recompense for performance, but they ultimately accepted the cucumber without complaint. It is when the experimental procedure encouraged a moral interpretation of the cucumber reward as unfair treatment (in comparison to the grape received for performing the identical task by the second monkey), that an emotional and behavioral response was provoked. Therein lies the power of grievance as a political tool. Promoting feelings of grievance is a form of moralization that triggers emotions and mobilizes action. When populist political leaders encourage their followers to blame poor economic or political conditions on the corrupt and selfish behavior of an uncaring elite, they are transforming those conditions from undesirable to unjust, and thus harnessing the power of grievance for political gain (see also Vallacher & Fennell, this volume).

A Temporal Analysis of Moral Judgment

Our analysis of grievance differs most from past treatments of similar phenomena in its focus on how feelings of past injustice affect moral evaluations of current acts and events. In fact, we see grievance as a neglected factor conspicuously missing from past treatments of every day moral judgment. To illustrate this, let us begin by briefly characterizing what we refer to as a temporal analysis of moral judgment.

Psychological work on moral judgment has directed substantial attention to the distinction between deontological and consequentialist approaches to moral evaluation. The distinction is generally framed as a clash between moral evaluations based on principles, rules, and the "means" of a given action (a deontological moral standard) versus evaluations based on the effects, consequences, or "ends" of the action (a consequentialist or utilitarian moral standard). In philosophy, this clash is often a normative one (which is the most appropriate approach to moral evaluation?), but in psychology the distinction is treated descriptively, as

two different psychological intuitions underlying moral judgment. For example, classic moral dilemmas such as the Heinz dilemma, made famous by the seminal work of moral developmentalist Lawrence Kohlberg (1975), ask people to choose between a deontological or consequentialist standard for moral judgment. In the scenario, Heinz is forced to decide whether to steal an overpriced drug that he cannot afford but will save his seriously ill wife's life. A deontological standard posits that it is morally wrong for Heinz to steal the drug because the act of stealing itself is morally wrong (and the ends of a moral act cannot justify the means). A consequentialist standard, in contrast, argues that it is morally acceptable (and potentially even morally required) for Heinz to steal the life-saving drug because acts should be judged by the morality of their consequences, not the morality of the act itself (thus the ends of an act *can* justify the means). Although other standards of moral judgment have also been discussed (e.g., person–centered approaches inspired by virtue ethics; Pizarro & Tannenbaum, 2012), psychological research on moral judgment has been dominated by work placing the clash between deontological and consequentialist intuitions at the center of human moral dynamics (e.g., Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001).

But considering moral judgment from a temporal perspective suggests another moral intuition active in moral judgment and moral conflict. Deontological judgment can be said to have a *present-focus* in that its central concern is the inherent morality of the act itself. Is the act the individual committed morally wrong (e.g., harmful, unfair, disloyal, disrespectful, or disgusting)? Does the act itself violate a moral principle? From a deontological perspective, the morality of a given act is determined in the present by the inherent moral qualities of the commission of the act itself.

Consequentialist moral judgment, in comparison, has a *future-focus*. As the name belies, the essential concern of a consequentialist morality is the future consequences of the act. Will the future consequences of the act be positive or negative? Can the morality of the act be justified by the positivity of its future consequences? From a consequentialist perspective, then, the morality of a given act is not solely a function of the moral quality of the act itself, but instead by an analysis of whether the act, even if it is itself morally problematic (e.g., pushing a large man to his death to stop a trolley), is likely to produce morally good consequences in the future (e.g., lowering the death toll of a trolley accident from five to one).

What is missing, of course, is the past. Is there a moral standard that adopts a past-focus on moral judgment? We suggest that grievance is just this sort of past-based moral analysis. Following Lakoff (2002), we call this the *moral accounting approach* and suggest that when evaluating the morality of a given act, in addition to considering the moral qualities of the act itself and its potential to produce good or bad consequences in the future, we also consider the moral history of the act. In Lakoff's analysis, the guiding metaphor for moral judgment is a balance sheet, a tally of past moral debts, deposits, and repayments through which the

acceptability of the current act is evaluated. People keep track of when someone owes them a moral debt (e.g., they have wronged you or others in the past) or alternatively has built up a moral surplus (e.g., they have treated you or others more generously than necessary in the past) as it helps them decide how to behave and who to trust. From a moral accounting perspective, then, the morality of a given act is determined, not just by its present moral qualities or its future moral consequences, but also by the legacy left by moral transactions of the past. Most important for the current purposes, just as a consequentialist view suggests that the morality of an act in the present can be justified by its consequences in the future, a moral accounting view posits that the morality of an act in the present can be justified as a redress of grievances experienced in the past. When populist leaders encourage the framing of unfavorable conditions as the result of past injustice, they seek to use grievance as a way to not just motivate political retribution, but also to justify it.

The Collateral Costs of Grievance

To summarize our argument so far, evoking morality is an effective way to mobilize action, and framing issues to highlight feelings of grievance is a form of moralization used in populist movements. Feeling aggrieved is a natural and common outcome of social exchanges, yet it can be encouraged by framing the morality of current decisions in the light of past moral transactions. Just as we have the intuition that morally questionable behavior can in some circumstances be justified by future beneficial consequences, we have a similar intuition that it can also be justified as a legitimate response to past injustice or inequity.

It is the power of grievance to evoke emotion and mobilize and justify action that makes it attractive to politicians, but evoking grievance as a political strategy has two clear collateral costs: it can be used to justify undemocratic means to gain political power, and its evocation risks initiating a self-escalating cycle of interfactional political conflict (see also Forgas & Lantos; and Krekó, this volume). We will discuss each of these in turn.

Grievance Defines Immorality Down

If in 2015 you had asked political liberals in the U.S. whether they thought it was morally appropriate for a Democratic Senate to prevent a Republican president from appointing the Supreme Court nominee of his or her choosing, the huge majority would probably have said no. If you asked them today, the majority would very well say yes. The difference, of course, is that in the meantime, a Republican Senate refused to hold hearings to consider Democratic president Barack Obama's nominee for the Supreme Court, Merrick Garland, ultimately preventing Garland's appointment to that august judicial body and leading liberal Americans to feel deeply aggrieved.

This anecdote illustrates a key way that grievance affects moral evaluation. Just as a morally questionable act can be justified by its future positive consequences according to a consequentialist moral view, it can also be justified by past grievances according to a moral accounting perspective. Thus, when considered alone, the thwarting of a president's legitimate right to appoint Supreme Court Justices seems to cross an obvious moral line. But when that line has previously been crossed by the other side, then crossing it again only seems fair, as moral restitution, a way to balance the moral checkbook. Grievance in this sense can be said to "define immorality down" (see Moynihan, 1993; Haslam, 2016); an act that in the absence of grievance would have been seen as morally unacceptable becomes more acceptable when it can be construed as payback for a previous injustice.

To illustrate this effect, we conducted a proof of concept study on 201 participants using short vignettes in which a target individual commits a minor moral transgression, either after being victimized or with no mention of prior victimization. For example, one of the vignettes read:

> Riley and Jordan have been dating for six months and have recently moved in together. [Riley discovers that Jordan was unfaithful on a recent weekend trip. In response,] Riley posts intimate and embarrassing pictures of Jordan on a social media site. How morally wrong was Riley's behavior?

Half of the participants received this full version mentioning Jordan's infidelity, while the other half read a version in which mention of it was deleted (the bracketed portion above was not included). Across four vignettes of this kind, we found a clear effect such that the identical moral transgression (e.g., keeping the change from a cashier, violating a "no compete" contractual clause) was seen as significantly less morally condemnable when the perpetrator of the act had previously been victimized (see Figure 2.1). The idea here is that when it is made salient that an actor has a prior grievance, untoward behavior by that actor is evaluated less harshly, as if prior injustice provides some degree of "license" to behave badly (Effron & Conway, 2015), that the world has a moral debt that has to be made right again.

It should be noted that there is nothing particularly irrational about this effect, especially if our participants were doing it through conscious (karmic) calculation (e.g., "this guy got a bad break, so it is understandable that he cut a moral corner"). It makes good sense that people would maintain some form of moral balance sheet—a tab of their moral expenditures and debts, of inputs and outputs, of what they owe others and, especially, what others owes them (Fiske, 1992). This point is even clearer in an explicitly financial context. It is wrong to steal $500 from another person, but if that person steals $500 dollars from you, it seems perfectly fair (i.e., moral) for you to steal $500 back from them. There are also many real-world examples of grievance-based phenomenon that, while sometimes controversial, are generally seen as reasonable policy proposals. The
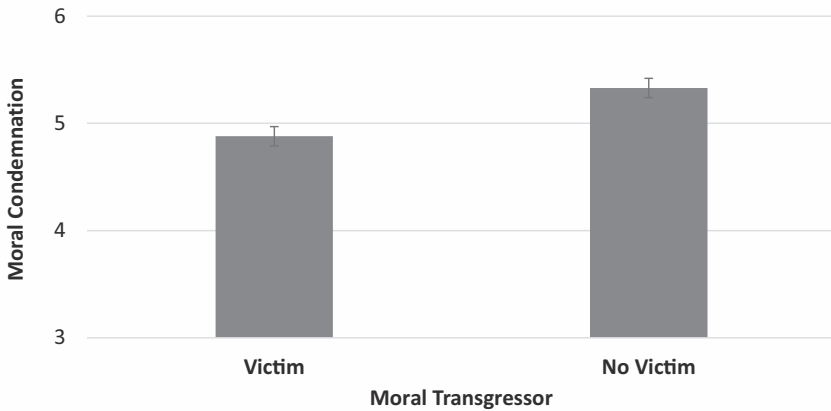
FIGURE 2.1   The effect of prior victimization on evaluation of moral transgressions.

best example perhaps is affirmative action, in which a prior grievance (a history of government-sponsored discriminatory behavior toward African-Americans) is used to argue that procedures typically viewed as fair (college admission based solely on demonstrated merit) should be justly abandoned in favor of a process that is clearly seen an unjust in other contexts (preferential treatment based on race). Just as populist leaders evoke real or imagined past adversity to justify radical engagement (see also Golec de Zavala et al.; van Prooijen, this volume), past injustice is often seen as justification for extraordinary measures that in other situations would not be tolerated.

But therein lies the problem. Feelings of grievance can lead people to feel licensed to abandon previous moral and procedural constraints. Although sometimes these constraints feel arguably bendable (e.g., adding race to a list of other factors considered for college admission), abandoning other moral rules, such as adherence to democratic political tactics or prohibitions against violence, can be substantially more problematic. Research on highly contentious and moralized political environments has found them to foster an increased willingness to condone undemocratic means to achieve desired political ends (Ryan, 2017; Skitka et al., in press), up to and including violence (Fiske & Rai, 2015; Zaal, Laar, Ståhl, Ellemers, & Derks, 2011; Kalmoe & Mason, 2020). In the U.S., partisan anger is associated with tolerance of cheating, lying, and voter suppression as acceptable political tactics (Miller & Conover, 2015). Grievance-driven moralization seems particularly likely to produce a similar moral licensing effect. Empirically, state-level increases in abortion rates and female participation in the labor force have been found to precipitate right-wing terrorist attacks (Piazza, 2017). Anecdotally, the violence and looting that often occur as an early response to highly publicized incidents of racial injustice seem a good example of how feelings of grievance,

once inflamed, can fuel and justify behavior that would otherwise be eschewed as unacceptable.

Grievance Escalates Conflict

"He hit me first!" "But he hit me harder!" Many parents have heard some variant of these explanations emanating from the back seat of the car on a long family drive. In important ways they represent the prototype of human intergroup conflict: two sides locked in combat, each feeling their aggressive stance toward the other is justified by legitimate grievance (one because they were attacked first and the other because the response to their initial attack was disproportionate). And whether it is a backseat skirmish between two children or the decades long Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the fight seems unlikely to end spontaneously, and instead seems likely to intensify with time. If you want the conflict to end, someone is going to have to go back there and stop it (see also Bar-Tal & Magal, this volume).

As described above, one important effect of grievance is a willingness to endorse behavior that would otherwise be seen as morally unacceptable. This effect is bad enough, given that it can lead to abandonment of democratic principles or even the endorsement of violence as a legitimate political strategy, but its negative effects can be compounded if it sets off a self-escalating cycle of increasingly immoral call and response from the two interacting parties.

Given the ubiquity of self and group favoring biases in human judgment (e.g., Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2005; Stanovich, West, &Toplak, 2013; Tajfel, 1970; see also Hogg & Gøetsche-Astrup, this volume), people should be expected to be more likely to notice and account for situations when they themselves or their ingroup has been aggrieved than to notice and account for situations that are likely to aggrieve other individuals or outgroups. If people are more sensitive to their own grievances than to the felt grievances of others, then attempts by an aggrieved side to compensate for that grievance affirmatively are likely to be seen by the non-aggrieved side as an inappropriate overreach. Now suppose that the aggrieved side is successful in enacting the extraordinary measures they feel are necessary to re-establish justice. These measures, while perceived as fair, just, and appropriate by people who feel the grievance most strongly, are likely to be seen as unjustified escalation by others.

And thus the cycle begins. Because each side feels its own grievance more intensely than the grievances of the other, each side endorses remedies that they feel fairly redress the grievance but that the other side sees as unfair and extreme (Stillwell, Baumeister, & Del Priore, 2008). This cycle should not only be self-reinforcing but also self-escalating because of differences in what each side sees as a "proportionate response". As the cycle continues, each side's sense of victimhood should increase, and with each exchange the standards for what counts as a morally acceptable response becomes more lax. More and more extreme

responses occur as each side pays back the other side "with interest" and a state where both sides feel equity has been achieved becomes more and more elusive.

The point here is that while stoking feelings of grievance can be an effective motivator of political action, it is also a strategy that is potentially corrosive to political civility, compromise, and negotiation—and in the extreme even to the adherence to the rule of law and the rejection of violence as a political tactic—by lowering standards for what counts as morally appropriate behavior and initiating a self-escalating cycle of conflict, payback, and competitive victimhood (e.g., Young & Sullivan, 2016).

Grievance and Populist Politics

Now that we have presented the outlines of a general psychology of grievance, let us return briefly to trace some additional connections between our analysis and populist politics.

Among the multiple approaches to the study of populism existing in political science, the *ideational approach* is particularly fit to engage in a dialogue with moral psychology (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Unlike theories that emphasize social and material conditions to explain social movements, the ideational approach conceives of populism as a *set of ideas*, that is, political attitudes and beliefs (Kriesi, 2020). Analyses inspired by this perspective focus on the way populists and their followers construe their social situation, how populist leaders develop a specific discourse to reflect and encourage this construal, and how political decisions must be understood through that prism (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

According to this view, populism does not have unique ideological content. Instead, populism is seen as a "thin-centered ideology" that adapts to each cultural and historical situation and becomes blended with "thick" ideological contents like socialism, fascism, or nationalism. What examples of populism of every ideological bent have in common, however, is the presence of a highly moralized discourse, characterized by all-or-nothing thinking structured around the dichotomy of a "pure people" versus the "corrupt elite" (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Whether they come from the political right or left, populist leaders typically present themselves as the incarnation of the will of the people, while elites are construed as the absolute other, the enemy, corrupt and self-interested groups who are responsible for keeping power and resources away from the people. Democratic processes, such as dialogue, dissent and compromise, are morally regarded as a betrayal of the people and as an obstacle to the restoration of their rightful dominance (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018).

In addition to this moralized view of politics, including a tendency to disregard the formal niceties of democratic process in pursuit of moral ends, at least three other connections can be seen between our analysis of grievance psychology and the literature on populist politics.

First, one of the core elements of populist rhetoric is the articulation of grievances in order to mobilize followers and voters (Aslanidis, 2017). Grievance, of course, is a common theme in politics generally. For example, analyses of Twitter activity during protests in Ferguson, Missouri, in response to the police killing of a young African-American man named Michael Brown, yielded that roughly 40% of the tweets explicitly mentioned grievances against the police, the justice system, and race relations (LeFebvre & Armstrong, 2018). Successful populist leaders are able to politicize—and moralize—issues beyond traditional left–right axes, in order to frame the entire political establishment as the dangerous group for the people (Roberts, 2018).

The term "grievance" in political science is usually used to describe material conditions of deprivation that might explain political processes. But grievance is more than just objective deprivation. Siroky and colleagues (Siroky, Warner, Filip-Crawford, Berlin, & Neuberg, 2020) analyzed different types of intergroup conflict in 100 countries. Analyses showed that levels of violent conflict in a country were better explained by the *perceived* unfairness of the between-group inequality rather than the *actual* differences in material resources across groups. And material and subjective grievances can sometimes interact. Three cross-country experimental studies showed a significant effect of anti-elitist messages on "pocketbook anger" (i.e., anger related to one's own financial situation) that interacts with socioeconomic status: pocketbook anger is more easily triggered by populist prompts for individuals in the lower and middle classes than in the upper classes (Marx, 2020).

Populist leaders often craft elaborate narratives in which grievances have a clear source, the elite, who are responsible for the suffering of the people (Hawkins, 2018; Rivero, 2018), and a clear remedy, electing the populist leader. This blaming narrative is especially visible in those discourses that hold salvific, redemptive, or heroic characteristics, where the leader is offered as the only effective means to redress historic injustices (da Silva & Vieira, 2018; P. Diehl, 2018; Montiel & Uyheng, 2020; Schneiker, 2020).

A second theme connecting grievance psychology and populist politics is the role of emotions. Moral grievances are related to feelings of frustration, anger, and resentment, as they involve the appraisal of goals as being unfairly hindered while others enjoy undeserved positive outcomes (Feather & McKee, 2009; Feather & Sherman, 2002). An analysis of Facebook posts by German Bundestag candidates in 2017 showed that messages including typically populist themes—i.e., anti-elitism, exclusion of outgroups, and negative views on political actors—were significantly more likely to receive "angry" user reactions than "like" or "love" user reactions (Jost, Maurer, & Hassler, 2020). A comparative analysis of the first inauguration speeches of Obama and Trump yielded more expressions of anger for the latter, with Trump almost doubling the number of targets of anger mentioned by Obama (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018). Similarly, experimental manipulations

of populist rhetoric have found that enhanced feelings of anger increase the persuasiveness of political messaging, over other feelings such as pride, hope, or fear (Wirz, 2018). Anger and resentment are essential components of the collective emotional dynamics of both left- and right-wing populist movements (Salmela & von Scheve, 2018).

Finally, our analysis of grievance psychology argues that moral judgments based on grievances are temporally anchored in the past, rather than in the present or the future. A past-oriented mindset also seems to be a feature of populist attitudes and discourse.

To illustrate this point, we retrieved data from the Global Populism Dataset 1.0 (Hawkins et al., 2019), which compiles hundreds of speeches from leaders worldwide that have been rated on their level of populism. We collected original speeches from leaders of Spanish-speaking countries, since it was the language that offered a wider variance in levels of populism. In some cases, the speeches were not available for analysis or there was not sufficient information to be matched with its actual populism scores. Ultimately, we were able to successfully match 185 speeches by 57 different presidents from 16 Latin American countries and Spain.

Using the Spanish dictionary of LIWC 2015 (Pennebaker, Boyd, Jordan, & Blackburn, 2015), we extracted the proportion of words related to present tense, past tense and future tense. As can be seen in Figure 2.2, there is a tendency for populist speeches to have more past-oriented language in comparison to less populist speeches. The proportion of past-oriented language over both present and future-oriented language also increases as a function of the degree of populism of the speech. The past-focused temporal orientation might also tap other psychological processes connected to populist attitudes. Research shows that inducing collective nostalgia—i.e., feelings of longing and wistful affection about a socially shared past—increases ingroup preference in the form of domestic country bias (Dimitriadou, Maciejovsky, Wildschut, & Sedikides, 2019) and outgroup-directed anger (Cheung, Sedikides, Wildschut, Tausch, & Ayanian, 2017).

Past-focused temporal orientation is also at the core of some processes of political radicalization and populism. For instance, a study on Greek citizens in 2015 showed that willingness to be involved in protest and non-normative collective action was driven by past-oriented values, such as respect for tradition and conformity, rather than more future-oriented values, such as stimulation, desire for new experiences, or self-direction (Capelos, Katsanidou, & Demertzis, 2017). Historical grievances also play an important role in contemporary populist movements in countries such as Hungary and Poland (see also Forgas & Lantos; Golec de Zavala et al.; and Krekó, this volume). Similar results were replicated analyzing European Social Survey over the years 2004–2014 (Capelos & Katsanidou, 2018). Interestingly, this effect was not restricted to political conservatives.
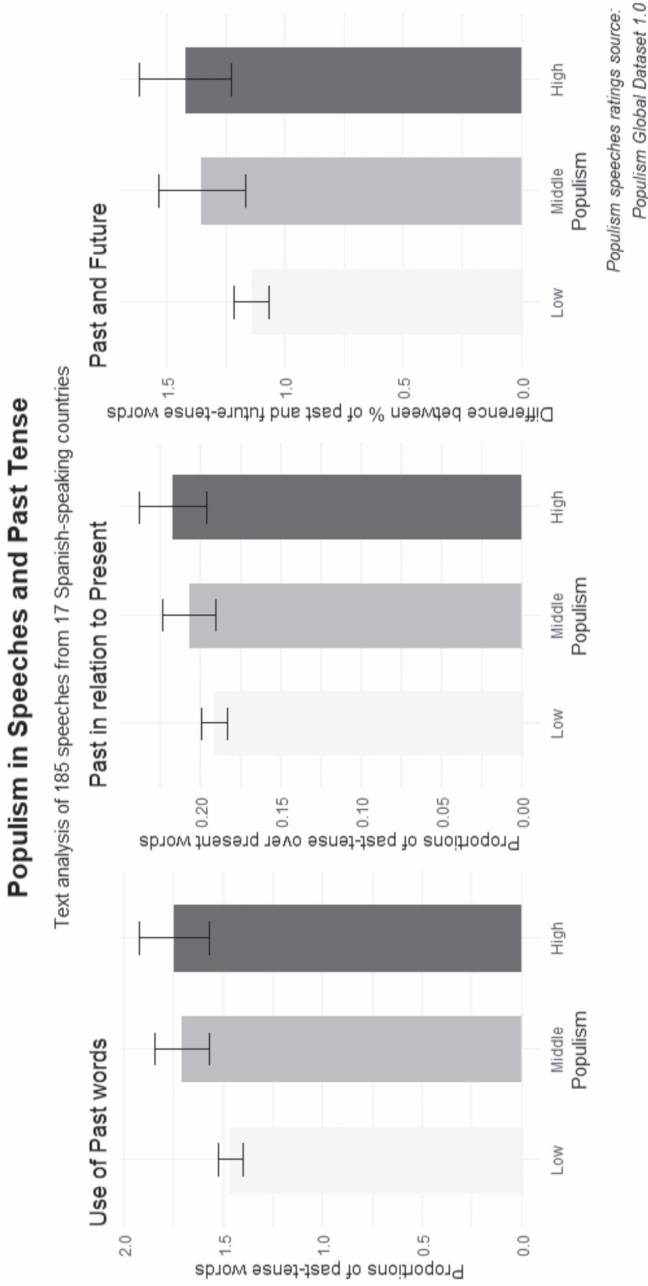
FIGURE 2.2 Use of past–tense words in populist discourse.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we presented a novel social psychological analysis of the concept of grievance, and argued that feelings of grievance play an important role in populist politics. Our treatment of grievance was largely theoretical, and many of the contentions we offered here await more data to support them. A number of fascinating questions remain, such as those surrounding the rationality of grievance perceptions (e.g., might people overextend grievance, feeling aggrieved even in response to non-moral situations like failure on a test of competence?), individual differences in grievance sensitivity, and how grievance relates to other political psychology phenomena like collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala & Keenan, 2020) and competitive victimhood (Young & Sullivan, 2016). Additional work exploring the role of specific grievance-related themes in populist rhetoric is also clearly needed.

A central message of this chapter was that evoking feelings of grievance moralizes politics, for both good and ill. Morality stirs emotion and action, and moral language may be particularly effective with people who are unmoved by ideology or the specifics of laws and legislation. For many voters, righting wrongs may be a more compelling message than writing policy. This is the attraction of a populist message. The downsides of moralization are equally clear, however, and grievance-based appeals have the potential to cause substantial collateral damage to political institutions and political civility. A fuller understanding of both the social psychology of grievance and populist politics is clearly needed in a world where democratic government is in decline, populist leaders with an authoritarian bent are on the rise, and grist for grievance is all around. It is our hope that this chapter makes some contribution to this fuller understanding.

Note

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