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WHY POPULISM ATTRACTS

On the Allure of Certainty and Dignity

*Arie W. Kruglanski, Erica Molinario,
and Gilda Sensales*

Introduction

Political commentators concur that a tide of populism is on the uptick worldwide (IESE Business School, 2017; Shuster, 2016). Whether in Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, or Asia, populist politicians (the likes of Marine Le Pen, Matteo Salvini, Geert Wilders, Vladimir Putin, Rodrigo Duterte, or Donald Trump) enjoy substantial popular support these days. In 2017, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) won 12.6% of the vote and entered the Bundestag with 94 seats; and in Austria, the Freedom Party won 26% of the popular vote and joined the governing coalition. In 2018, Milos Zeman's anti-immigrant rhetoric brought him to power in the Czech Republic. And in Italy, the anti-establishment Five Star Movement became Italy's largest party, while the anti-immigrant League jumped from 4% to 18% to become the dominant right-wing force. These are only some of the political events that have seen populist forces rising around the world (e.g., in Russia, Poland, Turkey, and Hungary; see also Forgas & Lantos; Krekó; and Bar-Tal & Magal, this volume).

Commenting on these events, pundits have noted that populist policies threaten the neo-liberal world order in place since World War II, and usher dangerous tension and discord into international relations (Amaro, 2017). If they are right, the current wave of populism could well constitute a movement of historical importance. But what exactly is populism? What is the secret of its appeal? The purpose of this chapter is to contribute to understanding this emerging phenomenon and the social psychological dynamic that underlies it.

Defining Populism

The term populism refers to a superficial ("thin") ideology (Mudde, 2004; see also Crano & Gaffney, this volume) depicting a major societal rift between the

people and an *elite*. The populist narrative is heavily value-laden. Influenced by nineteenth-century Romanticism, it portrays "the people" (folk) in highly complementary terms as *pure*, *kind*, and *trusting* (even if naïve). The *elites*, in contrast, are depicted as exploitative, corrupt, and immoral. They are alleged to oppress the people and do them harm. The populist narrative thus challenges the people to rise against the elites and depose them in the interest of justice and fairness.

Typically, populism addresses a circumscribed social category: a nation, an ethnicity, or a religion. The "people" are members of that category: denizens of a state, co-ethnics, or fellow believers. The "elites", in contrast, are characterized variously in different populist narratives: in the American context, the "Washington establishment" has long been the evil elite of choice, the "swamp" that Trump promised to drain. In other populist rhetoric, the despised elites are variously: "the federal government", the "military–industrial complex", "the capitalists", "the big banks", "East Coast intellectuals", and so on (Smith, 2017; see also Feldman; Marcus; and Huddy & Del Ponte, this volume).

A typical populist narrative is rabble-rousing. It alleges betrayal of the people by the elites (Rooduijn, 2015). After all, any form of government (including monarchy) is expected to reliably shepherd its "flock", *protect* it, and *provide* for its needs. The failure to do so is to renege on the government's sacred mission, and a reason for its removal, and replacement, peacefully or otherwise (Fournier, 2016).

The Roots of Populism

A major mystery of populism that scholars have attempted to solve is the issue of its root causes. The key question in this regard has been what attracts individuals to populist ideologies and why. And the hypotheses put forth in this regard, centered predominantly on frustrations and grievances of individuals self-identified as the "people" and viewing the elites as their detractors, the causes of their woes. Frequently mentioned woes included economic difficulties, political resentment, ethnic rivalries, the refugee crisis, and geopolitical tensions. For example, Spruyt, Keppens, and Van Droogenbroeck (2016) found that populist attitudes were related to a discontent fueled by perceived injustice (i.e., relative deprivation) and fast cultural changes that threatened individuals' place in society (see also Hogg & Gøetsche-Astrup; and Ditto & Rodriguez, this volume). Mughan and Paxton (2006) argued that support for populism is driven by anti-immigrant sentiments fanned by political propaganda. In this vein, Charitopoulou and García-Manglano (2018) found that support for the populist radical right is more likely to occur in municipalities with a moderate proportion of foreigners, and particularly of certain stigmatized minorities that presumably threaten the status of the original majorities. Support for anti-immigration policies was seen to stem from individuals' fears of economic displacement (Mughan, Bean, & McAllister, 2003), and the cultural concerns related to the potential threat that immigrants might pose for long-established cultural identities.

A threat to cultural identity is the centerpiece of Inglehart and Norris' (2016) theory of populism as a reaction to progressive value change, such as cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). According to this logic, members of once dominant social groups (e.g., whites) may feel threatened by a value shift that belittles their once elevated social status, and hence rally in support of a traditionalism that promises to reverse the trend and restore their former "greatness" (Zakaria, 2016).

Closely related to the status threat is the perceived danger to people's economic welfare (Inglehart & Norris, 2016) that may fuel populism. In support of this notion, radical right support in Western Europe was significantly stronger among individuals with economic grievances (i.e., unemployed and blue-collar workers). According to the economist Thomas Piketty (2014), despite the overall economic growth of Western countries, only a small percentage of the population has benefited from it, resulting in a growing economic inequality between the socio-economic classes. The rising inequality has exacerbated the rift between "winners" and "losers", and the sense of economic insecurity and relative deprivation among the latter. According to Fukuyama (2018), these fueled the politics of resentment and the demand for recognition. On a related note, scholars have argued that the rise of populism stems from citizens feeling ignored by politicians and unhappy about the state of politics in their country (e.g., Arzheimer, 2009; Lubbers, Gijsberts, & Scheepers, 2002). In short, populism has been studied and explained in reference to factors related to cultural, economic, or political frustrations.

Though insightful and informative, the studies of populism so far have paid rather scant attention to features that make the populist *narratives* attractive to frustrated individuals. Relatedly, given the diversity of frustrations assumed to drive individuals to populism, questions arise: (1) why the specific grievances mentioned in the literature contributed to populism in particular and whether their relation to populism is necessary and inevitable, and (2) whether these grievances share a common denominator. In the present chapter, we explore these matters.

The Promise of Populism: On Certainty and Dignity

Extensive research literature reveals that relative deprivation, loss of status, and economic pressures evoke negative feelings (e.g., Osborne, Smith, & Huo, 2012; Walker, 1999) and motivate people to action (e.g., Grant, 2008; Grasso & Giugni, 2016). The deeper questions being begged are *why* those particular grievances are frustrating and why populism is a way of addressing those frustrations.

Basic Human Needs

We assume that humans have a set of basic needs and that all their goals are ultimately oriented toward those needs' satisfaction (see also Bar-Tal & Magal,

this volume). Of course, the specific goals being pursued depend on the cultural context and on the circumstances. For instance, in a modern urban context, an attempt to gratify hunger may be through booking a table at a restaurant or ordering in, whereas in a hunter–gatherer society an attempt to gratify hunger may take the form of embarking on a hunt. The notion that humans have a fixed set of universal needs has had a long and storied past in psychology and the life sciences. Whereas Cannon (1932) famously focused on basic biological functions that humans and other living organisms seek to gratify, psychological theorists also posited a set of psychogenic needs considered basic and universal (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000; Freud, 1920/1966; Fiske, 2010; Higgins, 2012; Kurtz, 1956; Maslow, 1943). In this vein, Deci and Ryan (2000) proposed that competence, autonomy, and relatedness constitute the universal psychogenic needs, and obtained evidence for their operation; Higgins (2012) proposed that the needs for *truth*, *value*, and *control* are basic. And Fiske (2010) introduced a *BUC(k)ET* of fundamental needs (Belonging, Understanding, Controlling, Enhancing, and Trusting, etc.).

The assumption of basic human needs that underlie all possible human goals raises the question of what basic needs are involved in populism and make its narrative so appealing to millions around the world. And our hypothesis in this regard is that the two basic needs that make populism appealing are the needs for certainty and for dignity, or what we have called elsewhere the *need for cognitive closure* and *need for significance* respectively (e.g., Kruglanski & Webster, 1996; Kruglanski, 2004; Kruglanski et al., 2009, 2013, 2014, 2017). The latter comprises *individual significance* rooted in one's personal failures and successes, and *collective significance* rooted in the failures and successes of one's social group (Jasko et al., 2020).

There are several reasons why we deem the needs for certainty and for significance of such an overriding importance in reference to populism. Firstly, these needs are truly "basic" in the sense that they are implicit in most major classifications of psychogenic needs. For instance, Maslow's (1943) famous taxonomy contains the needs for self-esteem and confidence, Fiske's scheme contains self-enhancement and understanding, and Higgins' (2012) contains value (including status and prestige) and truth, all corresponding one way or the other to the significance and certainty needs, whereas Deci and Ryan's (2000) emphasis on competence and autonomy seem to tap the personal significance dimension primarily.[1]

Secondly, these two needs capture most of the concerns enumerated by scholars as sources of grievance and frustration assumed to drive individuals to populism. For instance, the sweeping cultural change that Inglehart and Norris (2016) highlighted in their work is readily seen to echo a disquieting uncertainty that may fuel the presently postulated quest for certainty. The economic threats and threats to status and positive identity typically invoked by populism scholars (e.g., Fukuyama, 2018; Piketty, 2014; Spruyt et al., 2016), as well as the notion

of relative deprivation (Gurr, 1970; Pettigrew, 2015), readily recall the presently postulated need for personal significance and mattering that economic and cultural threats jeopardize. In other words, the quest for significance is intended here as a broader term that addresses the common denominator of multiple prior motivational constructs (including also the need for achievement, competence, and self-affirmation among others).

Thirdly, the populist narratives in their various versions, across cultures and historical periods, exhibit the same universal structure: (1) they are simple and unqualified and hence certainty promoting, and (2) they offer empowerment and promise a way to significance and dignity (see also Fiedler, this volume). Typically, such narratives are Manichean in nature; they portray the good folk exploited by the evil elite and call for political action that would overthrow the elite and replace it at the societal steering wheel (see also Krekó, this volume). In the research described in what follows, therefore, we studied the hypothesized effects of those needs on supporters of populist parties in the United States and Italy. Before describing our specific studies, it may be well to provide some background concerning populism in these two cultural milieus.

Populism in the U.S. and Italy

The U.S.

Populism in the United States can be roughly divided between left-wing and right-wing variants; these vary according to how each defines the principal opponent of the people. For the left-wing populists, the foes are the economic elites, while for the right-wing populists the foes are non-white others and the state itself.

The left leaning variant of American populism harks back to the nineteenth-century People's Party, and the populist politics in the American South in early twentieth century. These include prominently Louisiana Governor Huey Long, whose program "Share Our Wealth" aimed at curtailing the wealth of the very rich and redistributing it to the poor, and it includes elements of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal.

From the mid-twentieth century onward, American populism has been a far more potent force on the political right than on the left. In the 1960s and 1970s, as civil rights movements roiled against white racism, patriarchy, and homophobia, opportunities opened for a right-wing populism that demonized the state, its values, and its programs (Self, 2012). Amid the social rifts of the 1960s, the arch-segregationist Alabama governor, George Wallace, ran for president in 1968 and offered an explicitly racist political agenda. His rhetoric proved popular not just in the white South, but also among white working- and middle-class voters in the Northeast, Midwest, and West (Carter, 1996).

The 1968 Republican presidential nominee, Richard Nixon, used the terms Silent Majority, Forgotten Americans, and Middle America to describe an

aggravated white majority squeezed by the poor below and the government elites above (Lowndes, 2008). With some modifications, this rhetoric was next used by several Republican leaders and pundits, such as Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and Pat Buchanan. The Great Recession of 2008 spawned the Tea Party movement, driven first and foremost by a concern to stave off encroaching state power over the lives of individuals. The movement has pushed Republicans in Congress past their comfort zone to radically reduce spending on programs for the poor as well as on middle-class entitlements such as Medicare and Social Security.

Although from the 1960s onward U.S. populism was rightward leaning, there have been populist phenomena on the left as well. Jesse Jackson's presidential campaigns in 1984 and 1988 sought to revive an older economic rhetoric of populism and link it to emergent struggles for racial equality. Ultimately, however, he was unable to generate sufficient momentum for his campaign beyond the Democratic primaries. Leftist populism emerged again in the wake of the 2008 recession, in the form of the Occupy Wall Street movement (Gould-Wartofsky, 2015). In promoting extralegal direct action in the heart of New York's financial district, this movement came to embody the populist notion of people against the (financial) elites. Much like the Tea Party, the Occupy Wall Street movement was short-lived, though it likely inspired the recent populist campaigns of Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren (in 2016 and 2020). The Tea Party enjoyed great popularity among Republican voters from 2008 onwards, paving the way for radical candidates such as Ted Cruz and Donald Trump in the 2016 GOP primaries (Skocpol & Williamson, 2016) and catapulting Donald Trump to presidency 2016.

It is also noteworthy in this context to acknowledge that the United States' very emergence as a nation rode a tide of "populism" against the British elite. As envisioned by the Founders, the American government was meant to represent the rule "of the people, for the people, and by the people" (Lincoln, 1863). Yet, in recent decades, trust in U.S. institutions has eroded substantially (Putnam, 1996), the income chasm has grown into an abyss, and the American Dream is increasingly looking like an unattainable fantasy instead of a feasible reality. These circumstances mobilized American voters to support elite-bashing populisms touted by Sanders and Trump, and commonly (albeit from opposing perspectives) decrying the economic and/or political ruling classes.

Italy

Contemporary Italian populism begins with the formation of the Northern League in 1991. Its origins lay in regional tensions regarding both political representation and economic differences between the south and the so–called Industrial Triangle (i.e., Genoa, Milan, and Turin). Under Umberto Bossi's leadership, the party drew a clear distinction between the hardworking people of the north

and the lazy southerners allegedly supported by corrupt elites. The Northern League's success coincided with, and contributed to, the fall of the First Republic: in the early 1990s, the "Lega", as it is known, became one of the most important parties in northern Italy; for the 1994 elections, it formed an alliance with Berlusconi's populist party Forza Italia and, together with the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) (which soon after the elections became the Alleanza Nazionale— AN), entered into Berlusconi's first center-right government.

Berlusconi entered the political stage with a market-liberal, anti-left platform that appealed to many "hardworking, upstanding" people; his rhetoric built on but also reacted to and expanded the populism of the Lega. In subsequent years (1994–2011), both populist parties carved their niches vis-à-vis each other, mutating into two forms of populism: Berlusconi's market-based center-right populism, which evolved into a mix of "anti-taxism" combined with animosity for the anti-Mafia justices, fused, perhaps ironically, with state spending (for example, on pensions and infrastructure). In reaction, the Northern League (now "League") retreated into its regional strongholds and began more clearly to combine its regionalism with a radical right ideology. With the more recent leadership of Matteo Salvini, the League reaches an expansion of consensus throughout the national territory, losing its regionalist characterization and accentuating its xenophobic orientation (Albertazzi, Giovannini, & Seddone, 2018). The final step in the process of the mutating populism took place with arrival of the Five Star Movement (M5S) in 2009. Ironically, M5S was in part a reaction to the continued presence of populism in power, that is, the center-right coalition of Berlusconi and Bossi (2001–2006 and 2008–2011), as well as the eventual fall of the 2011 Berlusconi government and the formation of the Mario Monti technocratic cabinet.

M5S, a populist libertarian force, combines an anti-elitist discourse and pro-environmentalism with left-wing economics (that is, opposition to "multinationals"), right-wing security, and anti-immigration policies (Pirro, 2018). In the case of the M5S, its leader Beppe Grillo juxtaposes the notion of the "pure and honest Italian citizen" with the "corrupt Italian political class" and in particular the "mainstream" political parties and media. The M5S political orientation resulted in its joining forces with the right-wing populist League in forming a new government following the elections results of 2018, and soon after as a response to the governmental crisis of 2019, with the main democratic party (Partito Democratico).

The Present Research

We carried out two correlational studies, one in the U.S. and one in Italy, in order to investigate the role of the need for cognitive closure and the quest for significance in motivating people's support for populist leaders and populist parties. The two studies included similar measures, appropriately translated into Italian for the

Italian sample. The contexts of the studies differed, somewhat, as described in the following.

Study 1: The U.S.

Sample

We surveyed 415 Mturkers residing in the US in November 2018 at the time of the midterm elections (for details, see Molinario, Jasko, Kruglanski, Sensales, & di Cicco, 2020). Our survey included measures of individual and collective need for significance, basic needs (in economic and security realms), the need for closure, cultural threat, political attitudes (liberal vs. conservative), and voting preferences (i.e., voting for Trump or for Clinton in the 2016 elections). After excluding 77 participants for data quality reasons, the sample was composed of 338 participants (207 males [61.2%] and 130 females, 1 other; Min_{age} = 19, Max_{age} = 72, M_{age} = 35.32, SD_{age} = 10.75), of which 47.6% self-identified as Clinton voters or supporters (n = 161) and 36.4% as Trump voters or supporters (n = 123); 16% of our sample did not respond to the political identification question.

We found that the Trump and Clinton voters did not differ on education, age, employment status, or gender. The Clinton voters reported significantly lower socio-economic status (SES) than the Trump voters, yet no significant difference in actual household income. Finally, Trump and Clinton voters did not differ significantly on their degree of populism.

Several differences between the Trump and Clinton voters are noteworthy. Specifically, Clinton voters reported a significantly higher quest for *individual* significance than did the Trump voters, and a significantly lower quest for *collective* significance. Furthermore, Clinton voters reported a significantly higher level of economic security needs, and safety needs, yet a significantly *lower need for cognitive closure* than Trump voters, as well as significantly *lower degree of cultural threat* than Trump voters.

In a multiple regression, we regressed populist attitudes (Akkerman, Mudde, & Zaslove, 2014) on the different predictor variables described earlier. The only factors that exhibited significant relations with populist attitudes were *individual quest for significance* and *need for closure*. Specifically, the higher the respondents' quest for individual significance, the stronger was their support for populism; similarly, the higher respondents' need for closure, the higher was their support for populism. We also found an interaction between *collective quest for significance* (i.e., on behalf of Americans in general) and voting preference. The higher the quest for collective significance, the stronger the tendency to support populism for Trump supporters but not for Clinton supporters.

These results are interesting in several respects. First and foremost, the findings suggest that when the needs for significance and cognitive closure are controlled for, neither cultural threat, economic threat, nor the threat to personal safety

predict populism. However, when all the latter variables are controlled for, the need for closure and the quest for individual significance are still significantly related to populism, which suggests that these two motivations may have been responsible, in part, for prior results that reported the effects of cultural (Inglehart & Norris, 2016) and economic (e.g., Mughan et al., 2003) factors as drivers of populism.

To probe this possibility further, we conducted two parallel mediation analyses. In the first we included basic economic needs as a predictor variable, the need for closure, the quest for individual significance, and the quest for collective significance (which is of particular interest only in Trump supporters) as mediators, and populist attitudes as the dependent variable. In Clinton supporters we found a significant indirect effect of economic needs, but only through quest for individual significance. In Trump supporters, we found a significant indirect effect of economic needs only through the quest for collective significance.

In the second mediation analysis, we included cultural threat as a predictor variable. In Clinton supporters we found significant indirect effects of cultural threat only through individual quest for significance and need for closure. In Trump supporters we found significant indirect effects of cultural threat through need for closure and collective quest for significance.

Study 2: Italy

Sample

We surveyed a sample of 1044 individuals from the general Italian population in April 2019 (April 9–30). We used a snowball sampling method approaching students at Sapienza University of Rome at first and asking them to involve other people in the research. The measures included in our survey were similar to those we used in the U.S. study described earlier. They comprised the quest for individual significance, for collective significance, the need for closure, populist attitudes, and cultural threat.

After excluding three participants who turned out to be underage, the sample was composed of 1041 participants (542 females [52%] and 496 males, and three missing values; Min_{age} = 18, Max_{age} = 70, M_{age} = 35.11, SD_{age} = 14.68). Of the sample, 20.3% self-identified as voters for the Democratic Party (PD) (n = 212), 28.4% as voters for the Five Stars Movement (Five Stars) (n = 296), and 11% as voters for the League (Lega) (n = 114). Five Stars voters and Lega voters turned out to have about the same educational level, which was significantly lower than that of PD voters. Five Stars voters, but not the Lega voters, also reported a lower SES than PD voters. We found no systematic differences in employment status between voters for the three parties, nor was there an association between age, gender, or party preference.

As expected, PD voters reported lower populist attitudes than Five Stars voters and Lega voters. In turn, Lega voters reported more populist attitudes than

the Five Stars voters. The three groups did not differ in their quest for individual significance, but they did differ in their quest for collective significance: PD voters were significantly *lower* on the quest for collective significance than Five Stars voters, with Lega voters reporting an even higher level of the quest for collective significance level than Five Stars movement voters.

As concerns *safety* and *economic* needs, PD voters reported a lower need for *safety* than Five Stars voters and Lega voters, while these two did not differ on their level of safety needs. Again, PD voters reported a lower need of *economic security* than Five Stars supporters, with the Lega voters occupying an intermediate position between these two.

Also, the three groups of voters did differ significantly on their need for closure. Specifically, PD voters and Five Stars voters were lower on this need than the Lega voters. Finally, there were differences in the level of perceived cultural threat between the groups, such that Lega voters were significantly higher on perceived cultural threat than PD voters and Five Stars voters.

Multiple Regression

A multiple regression analysis performed on the data yielded that the quest for individual significance, for collective significance, and need for closure were significant predictors of populist attitudes. However, none of the interaction terms comparing the effects of these variables across our three groups of respondents were significant.

Safety needs, economic needs, and political orientation did not contribute to the model. In contrast, we found a significant effect of cultural threat and SES on populist attitudes. Five Stars and Lega supporters evinced no significant effect on populism of the cultural threat, while its effect was significant among PD supporters. Specifically, the higher the level of cultural threat perceived by PD supporters, the higher their level of populist attitudes. Moreover, the effect of perceived SES was not significant among Five Stars and Lega voters, while it was significant among PD supporters: the higher their reported SES, the lower their populism.

In important respects, the results of Study 2 are consistent with those of Study 1. As in Study 1, despite some differences across groups of voters, quest for individual significance, quest for collective significance, and need for cognitive closure mediated the effect on populism of cultural threat and economic grievances. Specifically, similarly to what we found in Clinton supporters, PD supporters showed an indirect effect of economic needs mediated only through quest for individual significance. In contrast, Five Stars supporters showed a significant indirect effect of economic needs only through individual significance and need for closure. Finally, Lega supporters showed a significant indirect effect of economic needs only though individual quest for significance. With regard to cultural threat, and similar to the results for Trump supporters, both Five Stars and Lega supporters

(but not PD supporters) exhibited significant indirect effects of cultural threat mediated through need for closure and quest for collective significance, but not through quest for individual significance.

There were also some interesting differences between the Italian and the American contexts. Unlike the U.S. results, where the quest for collective significance was related to populism for one political group (Trump voters) but not another political group (Clinton voters), in Italy it was related to populism for all groups of voters. Populist attitudes in the Italian PD supporters are also explained positively by perceived cultural threat and inversely by individuals' SES. But our central and most important finding is that despite the considerable differences in context, the two presently postulated needs, namely for closure and significance, consistently predicted populism in both the U.S. and Italy.

General Discussion

Populism constitutes a societal phenomenon with significant political implications. For that reason, it has been of special interest to social scientists (economists, sociologists, and political scientists) who study macro level movements and developments. But there is a sense in which populism is rooted in individual decisions and preferences, so the ultimate answer to its root causes must be sought in individual psychology. As John Stuart Mill famously asserted, "all phenomena of society are phenomena of human nature".[2] This does not mean that economic, safety, and cultural threats do not matter. There is strong evidence, in fact, that they do. But they do, we submit, through their activation of basic psychological needs. After all, our choices, political or otherwise, are motivated, so the question is what human motivations are activated by economic or cultural threats often invoked as explanations of populism (e.g., Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

We presently identified two such individual motivations that macro level trends and developments may activate: the need for certainty and closure, and the need for significance and mattering. The need for certainty and closure is aroused by significant change that leaves individuals confused in face of the unknown; the change promoted by the 2008 recession, by globalization trends, by the "refugee crisis" and the unprecedented wave of immigration that has been transforming the demographics of societies worldwide. The quest for significance is activated by actual or expected loss of significance that the societal changes portend, being left behind by forces of globalization, having one's cultural identity as descendant of a time-honored tradition compromised by "hordes" of foreigners who threaten to erase that heritage and create new cultures and religions, making one feel like a stranger in one's own land (see also Hogg & Gøetsche-Astrup, this volume).

We therefore argued that the reason that populist narratives have such traction with publics these days is that they respond to these two basic needs (see also Bar-Tal & Magal; and Gelfand & Lorente, this volume). And they do so by being simplistic and dichotomous (Manichean), as well as significance-offering and

empowering (see also Krekó, this volume). We assumed further that even though the different populisms may differ from each other in their contents (e.g., in identification of the specific grievances and the specific elites assumed responsible for the grievances), they fundamentally reveal an identical core dynamic describable in terms of the resonance to uncertainty and disempowerment (significance loss) as earlier described. To test these ideas, we carried out two studies with diverse populations in which populism was manifest, namely the U.S. and Italy.

Despite the considerable differences separating the American and the Italian cultural contexts, and their different brands of populism, our psychological investigation revealed fundamental similarities between these two. Consistent with our argument, in both cases the need for cognitive closure (that taps the desire for certainty) as well as the quest for significance were positively related to populism. In fact, they eclipsed the previously touted relations to populism of economic needs and cultural threat.

In other words, when all these variables are taken into account, the more traditional factors used to explain populism, such as economic grievances and cultural threat, turned out to have nonsignificant impact on populist attitudes. Importantly, effects of cultural threat and economic needs on populism were indirect and mediated by the quest for individual significance and need for closure.

Beyond these fundamental similarities related to the role of the closure and significance motivations, our studies found some other interesting differences and similarities within the U.S. and Italian samples. To begin with the American sample, Clinton and Trump voters exhibited the same degree of populism. However, note also that in this particular sample the Clinton voters reported a lower SES than the Trump voters. Nonetheless, this difference remains nonsignificant when controlling for SES. Less surprising is the fact that Clinton voters experienced a less pronounced need for closure and a less pronounced sense of cultural threat than did Trump voters. Indeed, a meta-analysis conducted over five decades of research on conservatives and liberals (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003) found that conservatives (likely to be overrepresented among Trump voters) experience higher need for closure and higher degree of threat than do liberals (likely to be overrepresented among Clinton voters; see also Feldman, this volume).

It is also of interest that the Clinton voters exhibited a higher degree of the quest for individual significance and a lower degree of the quest for collective significance than the Trump voters. One might think that this is related to the fact that the Clinton voters exhibited a lower need for cognitive closure than the Trump voters, and the need for cognitive closure is known to be related to group centrism (Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti, & De Grada, 2006), yet the differences in quest for collective significance remained after controlling for the need for closure. In addition, Trump's slogan of "Make America Great Again" may evoke strong nationalist feelings, raising his voters' quest for collective significance. The fact that the Clinton voters exhibited a higher level of the individual quest for

significance than the Trump voters could reflect their greater degree of liberalism, and the fact that liberals subscribe more to individual moralities (of avoiding harm and providing care, as well as fairness and reciprocity) whereas conservatives also endorse such collectivist moralities as ingroup loyalty, respect for authority, and purity/sanctity (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; see also Cooper & Avery, this volume).

The Italian sample too yielded interesting findings. First, recall that the PD voters who were less populist than the Five Stars voters and the Lega voters had a higher education level and higher SES more generally than voters for the remaining two parties. These findings are consistent with the notion that less educated and less economically secure individuals feel more significance-deprived and are more confused by societal change than their more educated and economically secure counterparts. Also of interest, albeit unsurprising, is the finding that the PD voters as well as the Five Stars voters were lower on the need for closure than the Lega voters. Given that the PD voters were more educated and of higher SES than the Lega voters, for instance, implies that the upheaval and change that societies have been undergoing recently was less confusing and frightening for the PD voters and (to some extent) for the Five Stars voters than it was for the Lega voters. Overall, it appears that the Five Stars voters are closer to the PD voters than the Lega voters in several respects, such as their relatively high SES, low need for closure, and lower quest for collective significance. Finally, it is of interest that the effect on populism of SES was not significant among Five Stars and Lega voters, while it was significant and inversely related to populism among the PD supporters. Possibly, the Lega and Five Stars voters' support for populism derived from threats to significance of other than an economic nature, possibly stemming from the threat to cultural identity highlighted by Inglehart and Norris (2016). These questions could be probed more specifically in subsequent research.

In summary, the present research carried out across different cultural contexts found support for our hypotheses that the appeal of populism is predominantly driven by two basic motivations, that for certainty and coherence and that for personal significance. These two motivations could well be activated in large masses of people in times of substantial global change that induces substantial uncertainty in people's minds as coupled with threats to their significance and mattering in society. The dangers of populism are that it may breed autocracy, militancy, and a rigid state of mind (see also Feldman, this volume). The harrowing 1930s and 1940s of the last century bear terrifying witness to the havoc that unchecked populism can unleash. We must not repeat history's mistakes. We must immunize ourselves against populism's perfidious "siren call". Understanding the psychological dynamics of populism should enable us to avoid it and seek better solutions to problems of our time. Attention to people's motivation for closure and significance should play an important role in such solutions.

Notes

1. It is noteworthy that the need for significance and dignity was highlighted also by major social philosophers, including Aristotle (in his notion of polis that gives individuals recognition) as well as Fichte Hegel and their followers (cf. Hegel, 1807/1967; Honneth, 1996; Williams, 1992).
2. Mill (1843). A System of Logic, p. VI.

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