



**POPULISM: A PURE VERSION OF DEMOCRACY OR A
NEW FACE OF AUTHORITARIANISM?**

OĐUZHAN TUNA

Master's Thesis

Graduate School

İzmir University of Economics

İzmir

2022

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Master of Arts Program in Political Science and International Relations

Izmir

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ABSTRACT

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Tuna, Oğuzhan

Master of Arts Program in Political Science and International Relations

Advisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Serhun Al

January, 2022

Although it has its origins in the Ancient Greek era, the concept of populism became popular especially in the last quarter century thanks to the global inclination towards

populist type of politics. However, in the literature of populism, there is not enough theoretical emphasis on a scenario in which populists are in power with a considerable support of the people. In this regard, therefore, this thesis aims to find an answer to the question of “what is the position of populism in power with enough support of the people between democracy and authoritarianism?” from a theoretical perspective that is examined through the cases of Venezuela under the Chávez administration and Hungary under the Fidesz government. As a result of a qualitative analysis – including analysis of secondary sources and newspaper articles, and discourse analysis of the political leaders in the selected cases – that is supported by statistical data, it is deduced that even in different cases, despite the ideological, geographical and cultural differences among them, populist rulers with enough support of the people are, similarly, highly tended to create a hegemony by turning the democratic order, which had brought them to power, to an authoritarian system in which they had changed the status-quo in their favor via legal and constitutional reforms.

Keywords: Populism, democracy, authoritarianism, hegemony, democratic erosion.

ÖZET

POPÜLİZM: DEMOKRASİNİN SAF BİR VERSİYONU MU YOKSA OTORİTERİZMİN YENİ BİR ÇEHRESİ Mİ?

Tuna, Oğuzhan

Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler Yüksek Lisans Programı

Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Serhun Al

Ocak, 2022

Kökenleri Antik Yunan dönemine kadar dayanmakla birlikte popülizm kavramı, popülist siyaset tarzına olan küresel eğilim sayesinde, özellikle son çeyrek asırda popüler hale

gelmiştir. Ancak, popülizm literatüründe popülistlerin halkın hatırı sayılır ölçüdeki desteğiyle iktidarda olduğu bir senaryoya teorik olarak yeterince vurgu yapılmamaktadır. Bu nedenle, bu tez bu bağlamda, “halkın yeterli desteğiyle iktidardaki popülizmin demokrasi ve otoriterizm arasındaki konumu nedir?” sorusuna Chávez yönetimindeki Venezuela ve Fidesz hükümeti altındaki Macaristan vakaları üzerinden incelenen teorik bir perspektiften yanıt bulmayı amaçlamaktadır. İkincil kaynakların ve gazete makalelerinin içerik analizini ve seçilmiş vakalardaki siyasi liderlerin söylem analizini içeren ve istatistiksel verilerle desteklenen niteliksel bir analizin neticesinde, sonucuna varılmıştır ki, farklı vakalarda dahi, aralarındaki ideolojik, coğrafi ve kültürel farklılıklara rağmen, halkın yeterli desteğine sahip popülist yöneticiler, benzer şekilde, kendilerini iktidara getiren demokratik düzeni bir hegemonya oluşturmak için statükoyu yasal ve anayasal reformlarla kendi lehlerine değiştirmiş oldukları otoriter bir sisteme dönüştürmeye oldukça meyillidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Popülizm, demokrasi, otoriterizm, hegemonya, demokratik erozyon.



Dedicated to my beloved family

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Asst. Prof. Serhun Al for his guidance and support that enabled me to write this thesis. Besides, I am grateful to all my professors who have enlightened my path during my academic life. Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their never-ending support in whole of my life.



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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Politics is basically a struggle for power. Throughout history, various ways – including plots, repressiveness and use of violence – have been followed to reach that power and keep hold of it. Hence, one can say, without difficulty, that numerous internal disturbances and despotic regimes that have emerged throughout history in various parts of the world are the results of this struggle. However, with the genesis of democracy, the focus of this struggle has specifically become gaining the consent of the people, especially of those who have the right to vote. Yet, both historical and contemporary instances show that even democracy, which is expected to be a way of life in which there is an equal distribution of rights and freedoms, may turn into a hierarchical system in which everyone is forcefully expected to be subject to the one at the top, in the hands of those who regard ruling as a way of realizing personal hegemonic desires, not as serving for the people and the country.

While democracy, as the source of equality and liberty, can be overridden by non-democratic factors, such as military coups, it can also be exploited and eroded by those whom it makes the way for. It is revealed as a result of both history and the current conjuncture in different places in the world that the power of democracy can turn into a gun pointed at democracy itself with the shadow of demagoguery over the sacred values of democracy. Although the demagogic course of accession to power dates back to the Ancient Greek era with reference to the period of the reign of Peisistratus, who declared himself the tyrant of Athens with the support of the majority of the Athenian people who were composed of poor and rural segments of the society; today, the shadow of demagoguery over democracy appears with the name of populism in democratic societies.

However, despite the abundance of the adverse opinions on the concept of populism in terms of its relation with democracy, especially in the case of its accession to power, it should also be taken into account that there are also insisted claims that accept populism as the true version of democracy. In this respect, this thesis aims to clarify the exact location of populism on the line between democracy and authoritarianism by discussing on the question of “what is the position of populism in power with enough support of the people between democracy and authoritarianism?” It was seen as worth

discussing on such a question after a literature review on theoretical approaches to populism. As a result of the literature review, it was found out that although there are several studies aiming to define the concept of populism under a specific category and, to scrutinize its relation with the concept of democracy, there is a lack for the studies discussing about the in power populism, as also pointed out by Finchelstein (2017) as:

“Surprisingly, many scholars of populism, especially those who provide the more simplistic definitions, or the ones that only study populism as a movement in opposition, do not address the key issue of what was happening when populism reached power” (p. 176).

Considering the question above, in this thesis, it is mainly argued that when populists come to power with enough support of the people, they tend to erode and exploit democracy, and to create an authoritarian system of ruling in order to consolidate and perpetuate their presence in power.

Particularly after the American and French Revolutions, the ideas of democracy, equality, individual rights and freedoms have thoroughly begun to come to light and widely spread all around the world. These worldwide developments substantially started to lead to public backlashes against the harsh practices of dominant autocratic and authoritarian regimes. Besides, more recently, as Levitsky and Loxton (2013) point out,

“the collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent dominance of the West, together with unprecedented Western democracy promotion, raised the cost of dictatorship and created strong incentives to adopt formal democratic institutions” (p. 107).

Therefore, one can say that in the societies in which the democratic and liberal ideas had considerably taken root, the aspirants of power with hegemonic desires have compulsorily chosen to follow the path of democracy, at least until they come to power and have enough power to consolidate their presence in power. In such societies, those who see coming to power as a way of realizing their hegemonic ambitions generally seek for the support of the majority of the people, which can make their position in power absolute as a result of the majoritarian characteristic of democracy. And, as history has demonstrated many times, it is obvious that the easiest and the shortest way

of getting the consent of the people is to tell them what they want to hear, and to promise a fake paradise by exploiting their materialistic desires while inciting them by emphasizing what they lack, which is one of the most used methods of populists especially at the present time and in the recent past.

Although, as noted above, persuading the people with a populist-like manner dates back centuries, except some local level examples – such as of the late 19th century in the U.S., populism has considerably become a global phenomenon especially in the last quarter century. As it is firmly indicated in the related literature, populism is highly likely to appear and rise in times of crisis. Relevantly, while listing the factors which give acceleration to the spread of populism in the world, two factors come into prominence in particular: globalization and the refugee crisis.

Due to, as a result of globalization, the flow of migration from underdeveloped countries to developed countries, and to the flow of capital from developed countries to developing countries, globalization has become a useful instrument for the populist demagogues especially in developed countries who aim to totalize the people through material interests and nationalist feelings by demonizing migrants as the ones who are occupying the job opportunities of the local people, and by promising to bring domestic capital back to the country as in the “America First” doctrine of the former U.S. president Donald Trump in which he promises 25 million new jobs in the manufacturing sector by creating financially easier conditions to encourage the American companies to make them return to the U.S. from the countries such as China and Mexico (Long, 2017).

On the other hand, civil wars and internal disturbances have led to a refugee influx particularly from the Middle East and Africa to Europe. Such developments also serve for the interests of populists who tend to gain a political advantage through provoking the people against refugees by introducing them as a burden for the country. And it goes without saying that such discriminating attitudes towards migrants and refugees are highly likely to kindle the fire of racism.

Another crisis that populism highly feeds on is the legitimacy crisis of institutional democracy. Internal crises based on economy or governance can cause loss of public confidence in democratic institutions with populists' claims that institutional mechanisms and bureaucratic processes are responsible for such crises. With such claims, it can be said that while, on the one hand, populist political actors – as the ones who are outsiders for the ordinary institutional liberal democratic systems – aim to gather vote from the voters of the institutional political parties by means of discrediting them by introducing them as the corrupt winners of the corrupted system; on the other hand, they – especially those in power – aim to pave the way for a direct, de-institutionalized and unquestionable system which will serve themselves.

Hence, as it can be interpreted as the first step to realize hegemonic aspirations, one can deduce that populists endeavor to exploit conjunctural crises and deficits in the power struggle; while, beside this, it can be deduced that they are also in search of the ways for consolidating their presence in power and perpetuating their rule as the second step after coming into power to realize their hegemonic aspirations. That is to say, for the potential hegemons, that the mission of populism is not just limited to the process of coming to power in which populists do not have much of an instrument other than their discourse. Rather, it keeps going with additional instruments during in power thanks to being in the position of decision making. However, with the combination of hegemonic inclination of the ruler, support of the majority and, as a result of these, several legislative and constitutional rearrangements for the sake of strengthening the executive power, populist governments and administrations begin to take an authoritarian form while eroding democracy which, ironically, is the reason of their presence in power.

In order to broaden and elaborate this discussion in an orderly manner, after this introducing section, the methods of research and analysis used in this thesis will be introduced in detail. Since this thesis is organized as a theory based study which is supported by the analysis of the selected cases, it will also be mentioned of the case selection process.

In the second chapter, a comprehensive theoretical framework will be constructed on the issues of democracy and populism in general and, specifically, on the relations of

populism with democracy and authoritarianism when in power. Firstly, there will be an approach to the concept of democracy from the perspective of this thesis. Thereafter, there will be a theoretical discussion about the categorization, characteristics and mechanisms of populism. Afterwards, the discussion will be continued on the theoretical basis with the issue of populists in power, and with their tendencies towards democracy and authoritarianism. And lastly, there will be a theoretical depiction of the constitutions made or amended by the populist ruling elite.

In the following two chapters, there will be analyses of the two selected cases, Venezuela under the Hugo Chávez administration and Hungary under the Fidesz government, based on the constructed theoretical perspective. In those chapters, after the introductions of the general informations about the characteristics and historical backgrounds of them, the selected cases will specifically be analyzed in terms of their positions between democracy and authoritarianism. And finally, in the concluding chapter, there will be a discussion on the findings.

1.1. Methodology

In this thesis, there will be a searching for an answer to the research question of “what is the position of populism between democracy and authoritarianism when in power with enough support of the people?” based on the theory that suggests that the populists in power with enough support of the people – which means, for presidential systems, getting more than 50% of the votes in the elections, and for parliamentary systems, getting votes at a sufficient proportion in the elections to achieve the majority of the seats in parliament – are tended to erode and use the democratic order in their favor and thus, create an authoritarian system of ruling in order to consolidate their power and guarantee their presence in power for following periods. Since making certain quantitative measurements upon the concepts of populism, democracy and authoritarianization is not possible, the qualitative research method is preferred to apply as the main research method together with, when needed, some statistical data in this thesis. Considering the field of study, research question and main research method, the

data collection was made through the analysis of secondary sources, and also, through discourse analysis of the actors in the selected cases.

The analysis in this thesis will be made by constituting a comprehensive theoretical framework and making a case analysis based on the theoretical framework. There will be a case analysis of two cases which are Venezuela during the presidency of Hugo Chávez, and Hungary under the Fidesz government. The cases will be analyzed as the samples to examine the theory.

1.1.1. Case Selection

The cases of Venezuela under the Chávez administration and Hungary under the Fidesz government were selected as the prominent examples of left-wing and right-wing populism, respectively. Venezuela, on the one hand, is a Latin American country in which there is a presidential system; Hungary, on the other hand, is a Central European country with a parliamentary system. In this sense, it is aimed to achieve similar outcomes through two different cases in terms of the differences between their ideological stances, administrative systems, and geographical locations. Although there are more examples for the populists in power in recent years, the reason for not selecting them is that the conditions under which they were in power did not allow for a dramatic erosion of democracy, and for authoritarianization. For instance, as some prominent recent examples, the Trump administration in the United States, as an example of right-wing populism, and the Syriza-led government in Greece, as an example of left-wing populism, do not fit in the criteria to be selected as a case in this thesis, since, for the Trump administration, it was almost impossible to turn the democratic order into an authoritarian system due to the deep-seated institutional and constitutional characteristics of democracy in the United States; while it was out of the question for Syriza to create a hegemony in Greece because of the lack of parliamentary majority of the party.

Furthermore, specifically about the case of Venezuela, the Hugo Chávez period was preferred to select instead of the period of Nicolás Maduro, because although Maduro

displays typical populist attitudes, he took office as the successor of Chávez under the conditions in which there was already a status quo that have been built in favor of a populist regime. Thus, unlike Chávez, Maduro did not become the president as a result of a revolution-like process. Although he has been competing against his liberal political rivals, the competition against liberal democracy had already been won by his predecessor. Therefore, one can say that the Maduro era is just the continuation of the Chávez era, and, therefore, does not constitute an idiosyncratic example of left-wing populism in power.



CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to theoretically identify the position of populism among democracy and authoritarianism, and in the light of that identification, to analyze the selected cases, it is needed to develop a theoretical framework. In this chapter, with reference to the relevant literature, there will be an attempt to conceptually define democracy in general terms, a general definition of populism, a theoretical evaluation about the relation of populists in power with democracy and authoritarianism, and about the general characteristics of the constitutions prepared or amended by populist governments and administrations.

2.1. Conceptualizing Democracy

The concept of democracy is a kind of litmus paper in political science. Many of the conceptualizations in this realm are made through an evaluation of the compatibility and incompatibility, or of the closeness and distance between the subject phenomenon and the concept of democracy. However, the concept of democracy itself does not have a standardized clear definition. There are many different perceptions and evaluations in defining and measuring democracy. In this respect, before going into the details of the concept of populism, the conceptual approach of this thesis to democracy will be depicted based upon the academic discussions on the notion.

First and foremost, the very basic meaning of the notion of democracy, which etymologically comes from the Ancient Greek, is rule by the people. In this sense, democracy is unthinkable without the involvement of the people, whether directly or indirectly, in the decision making process. While, in the ancient ages, the criteria for involving in the decision making was highly restricted because, as Schmitter and Karl (1991) advert, of the criteria for being a citizen, such as gender, age, class, race, literacy, being a property owner, being a tax payer, and so on; in today's world, the citizenship criteria and, as a result of it, the involvement criteria in decision making has a more inclusionary feature. In modern democracies, all native-born adults possess the right to involve in the decision making process (Schmitter and Karl, 1991).

Thanks to the high level of elitism and, as a result of it, the restrictions on citizenship and, hence, the small number of participants in decision making in the ancient times, decisions could be taken through the direct contributions of the participants via debates. However, in today's inclusionary version of democracy, and also in the presence of nation-states contrary to the ancient city-states, the direct form of democracy has become almost impossible to work, at least at the national level, and this made a representative system in which a group of elected people have a duty to represent and serve – if they are in a ruling position – for not only themselves, but also the people who had elected them necessary. This is exactly why elections are essential in defining democracy, especially its modern version.

However, in spite of the fact that democracy begins with elections – as the minimal component of democracy – in today's democratic systems, it is not just about elections. At first, it is crucial to underline that unless they are held regularly and under free and fair conditions, elections cannot be a component of the concept of democracy. This basically means that for elections to be considered democratic, they must be held at certain periods with fair and equal opportunities for all candidates and parties, and without any enforcement to voters. Nevertheless, confining the concept of democracy just to regular, free and fair elections is still insufficient to conceptualize democracy, and is what Schmitter and Karl (1991) name “electoralism”.

It can be said that elections are a means to transfer power from citizens to the elected officials, so that collective decisions can be taken by them, for a certain period. This means that elections do not make the elected ones sovereigns. Contrarily, they are the ones authorized via elections to use power in the name and by the consent of citizens who are the real holders of power. Therefore, democracy requires certain boundaries to determine the scope of authority of the authorized, and rules and norms to specify how to use power. In this manner, Bobbio (1987) argues that:

“The only way a meaningful discussion of democracy, as distinct from all forms of autocratic government, is possible is to consider it as characterized by a set of rules (primary or basic) which establish who is authorized to take collective decisions and which procedures are to be applied in making collective decisions.” (p. 24).

In a similar vein, Schmitter and Karl (1991) state that:

“What distinguishes democratic rulers from nondemocratic ones are the norms that condition how the former come to power and the practices that hold them accountable for their actions.” (p. 76).

The embodiment of such rules and norms is usually the constitution that is formed through, directly or indirectly, a social agreement. However, since practicing of them cannot be left to the initiative of the rulers, it should, of course, be checked whether those constituted rules and norms are violated. At this point, the institutional mechanisms and principles of democracy, such as rule of law and separation of powers, have a critical role to provide supervision over elected officials.

Although such a supervisory and limiting approach of democracy is generally categorized as the liberal model or liberal conception of democracy, as Coppedge et al. (2011) do, without the principles and mechanisms of this conception, in fact, democracy would be incomplete. Therefore, it can be said that a consideration of democracy without the liberal principles and mechanisms is fallacious. On the contrary, those principles and mechanisms contribute to the consolidation of democracy, and make it work properly not only in terms of confining rulers and making them accountable, but also in terms of providing healthy and fair conditions for electoral competition by the promotion and guarantee of freedom of expression, of opinion, of association, and so on.

In this respect, Bobbio (1987) underlines the interdependence between liberalism and democracy. He asserts that:

“if liberalism provides those liberties necessary for the proper exercise of democratic power, democracy guarantees the existence and persistence of fundamental liberties. In other words: an illiberal state is unlikely to ensure the proper workings of democracy, and conversely an undemocratic state is unlikely to be able to safeguard basic liberties.” (Bobbio and Bellamy, 1987, p. 26).

Additionally, Diamond (1997) claims, in a similar manner, that transition from a liberal democracy to an illiberal democracy means deconsolidation of democracy. And, except

for the emerging democracies, an unconsolidated democracy is highly likely to break down, and cannot be considered as a true democracy due to the lack of confidence it presents. Yet, for the sake of democratic consolidation, Diamond (1997) points out the importance of the confidence in the liberal and constitutional components of democracy both at the mass and elite levels. In this direction, he states that:

“At the elite level, all significant political competitors or potential competitors (not only parties but also interest groups and movements) must come to regard democracy – and the laws, procedures, and institutions it specifies – as the only game in town ... At the mass level, there must be a broad normative and behavioral consensus – cutting across class, ethnic, nationality, and other cleavages – on the legitimacy of the constitutional system” (Diamond, 1997, pp. 14-15).

Furthermore, for a sustainable and consolidated democratic order, Nations in Transit – the study of Freedom House aiming to evaluate the state of democracy in different countries – considers the presence of the independence of the media, civil society, judiciary, and of the autonomy of local governments necessary. However, even if all such liberal and constitutional requirements of democracy are met, there is still one more crucial obstacle to be overcome which originates from democracy itself as a basic characteristic of it, majoritarianism. The majoritarian characteristic of democracy simply means that in decision making, what the majority of decision makers – or voters, when considered elections – support is accepted regardless of the other alternatives.

Such a system, without doubt, can lead to crushing of minorities under majority in a society. According to Munck (2014),

“democracy is about the value of equality, in the sense that every person who lives under a government has the same claim to freedom and thus should have his or her preference weighted equally.” (p. 11).

From this point of view, in order to provide an equal environment in a democratic system, in which there is no “tyranny of majority” in Tocqueville’s words (Schleifer, 2012), the principle of pluralism must not be ignored. In this respect, lastly, it is worth mentioning that Schmitter and Karl (1991) suggest that:

“successful democracies tend to qualify the central principle of majority rule in order to protect minority rights. Such qualifications can take the form of constitutional provisions that place certain matters beyond the reach of majorities (bills of rights)” (p. 79).

2.2. Defining Populism

In this part, there will be an attempt to theoretically define the concept of populism. For this purpose, firstly, the issue of categorizing populism will be addressed, and secondly, the general characteristics and mechanisms of populism will be discussed.

2.2.1. Theoretical categorization of populism

Undoubtedly, it is a complex issue to define populism accurately since it does not have certain limits both in theory and practice. This complexity is also visible in the literature. There are different theoretical approaches towards populism. Categorically, it is mainly evaluated as an ideology (Urbinati, 1998), as a movement or mobilization (Di Tella, 1997; Canovan, 1999; Abts and Rummens, 2007; Arditì, 2007; Diamond, 2017; Rensmann, 2018; Halmai, 2019), and as a discourse or rhetoric – particularly based on propaganda and manipulation (Aslanidis, 2016; Cardoso, 2006).

From my point of view, populism cannot be categorized as an ideology, because the claims and advocated thoughts within the frame of populism do not exhibit consistent and standard characteristics. While some populists can have nationalist, or even, fascist inclinations, other populists can take on the face of socialism; while some of them can act inclusively, others can act exclusively; while, for populists, it is possible to be on the side of the right-wing of politics, it is also possible to be on the left-wing. Therefore, just as Mudde (2004), Mudde (2013), and Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013) define it as a thin-centred ideology, populism does not constitute a complete ideology; it usually needs to be combined with comprehensive ideologies. In this respect, I agree with Riedel’s (2017) description that populism has a chameleonic feature which is nothing but

discourse by itself, and needs to be filled by entrenched ideologies; and, similarly, with Taggart (2000) who theoretically defines the natural position of populism as:

“an adjective attached to other ideas that fill the space at the empty heart of populism” (p. 4).

Additionally, populism obviously has a movement-spirited characteristic not only politically, but also economically and sociologically. However, since populism does not have a certain ideological feature, populist movements lack a certain direction and show variable characteristics depending on the conjuncture. In this regard, Canovan (1999) indicates that:

“Where economic policy is concerned, for example, populists in one country with a hegemonic commitment to high taxation to fund a generous welfare state may embrace an agenda of economic liberalism, while other populists elsewhere are reacting against a free market hegemony by demanding protectionism and more state provision” (p. 4).

Furthermore, as Mudde (2004) points out, the participants of populist movements are active only when they are mobilized by the leader. This means that such movements have no specific goal than the leader’s will of achieving his political aims. So, it is not possible to talk about a single and standard populist movement. Therefore, the categorization of populism as a movement might be fallacious.

On the other side, Aslanidis (2016) defines populism, by rejecting the idea of “populism as an ideology”, as discourse. He claims that:

“to seize and measure populism, it has been found sufficient to meticulously analyze the discourse of political actors and see if discursive elements of exalting the ‘noble People’ and condemning ‘corrupt elites’ in the name of popular sovereignty are there, and how much of them” (p. 97).

However, although one can say that considering populism as a complete ideology by itself is an exaggeration, it is also deficient to degrade it to just a level of discourse, rhetoric or mobilization, because these are just the mechanisms of populism instead of

being categories per se that we can put populism into for the purpose of conceptualizing it. In short, due to, as a concept, its erratic nature, it is not much possible to put populism into a single specific theoretical category for sure. To consider populism in one of the categories mentioned above is neither completely false, nor completely true. From a different point of view, even, it might also be possible to consider populism as a category in itself as a result of its distinctive characteristics. Herewith, in defining populism, rather than the effort to put it into a theoretical pattern, it would be more effective to consider the mechanisms and general mentality prevailing in the spectrum of populism.

2.2.2. Characteristics and mechanisms of populism

There is no specific constant ideology of populism, and no certain single profile of populists, because populism is a means rather than an end on the track of actualizing political goals, and in order to achieve those goals, there is nothing that cannot be reshaped. However, in clarifying what populism is and who populists are, there are some main common styles of discourses and mindsets that can be used. First of all, there are two prominent keywords in defining populism: “anti” and “discrimination”. The “anti” character of populism surely comes from its defiance against the liberal and pluralist pillars of democracy, and against the democratic elitism. With regard to the characteristics of populism, the most agreed point in the literature is that populism is not compatible with political liberalism, and even, that there is a tough antagonism between the two. The antagonistic approach of populism towards political liberalism is a result of populists’ hegemonic desires. As will be discussed later, this anti-liberal or illiberal hegemonic inclination together with the support of the majority is most likely to appear as an authoritarian way of ruling. Besides this, creating antagonism against the liberal pillar of democracy might also be a useful mechanism for populists in struggle for power.

One of the main claims of populists is that democracy should be direct. Related to this claim, they propagandize against the indirectness of liberal democracy because of its

procedural and mediating roles, via institutions, between the ruler and the ruled. This institutional identity of liberal democracy is annoying for populists, because they are mostly political outsiders, such as Hugo Chávez who was formerly a military man, and Donald Trump from the business world, with the desire of coming to power in the shortest way, and without, at the same time, the experience and consciousness about the functions and importance of institutional mechanisms for the durability of democracy.

Furthermore, as an institutional mechanism, checks and balances present a shackling role opposing the hegemonic desires of populists in power. For these reasons, in order to get rid of the liberal and institutional mechanisms of democracy, populists appeal to the majoritarian characteristic of democracy by trying to get the support of the majority of the people. At this point, as a result of the defiance of populists against political institutionalism and the indirectness of liberal democracy, the need of a charismatic leader – who will be embraced as one of the people, but as a transcendent one at the same time – emerges, because as Mudde (2013) indicates, he can easily appeal to the people in mobilizing and governing, without any mediatory involvement of political institutions such as parliaments and parties.

Charismatic – or in Finchelstein’s (2017) word, messianic – populist leaders allegedly take on a unifying mission over the nation which is introduced as deluded with broken promises of liberal democracy. According to Arditì (2007), by referring to Canovan (1999), there is a

“gap between the promise of power to the people – understood as a capacity to exercise some control over major issues that affect our lives – and the actual performance of existing democracies on issues like participation and the responsiveness of elected representatives” (p. 45).

As a response – by advocating the free expression of the will of the people – to the mediation via institutions and presence of professional experts, who are unconcerned about the will of the people, in the democratic process, Arditì (2007) refers that Canovan (1999) also indicates that populist movements empower

“charismatic leaders who promise to break with the routine of bureaucratic institutions and to turn politics into a more personal experience” (Arditi, 2007, p. 45).

That is to say, while there is a system based opposition of populists against liberal democracy, they also target the liberal elites who are – according to populists – the corrupt rule makers and monopolists of power in the liberal democratic system. However, as Müller (2016) argues, it is not enough just to advocate the people against the elite in order to be considered as populist. The claims that the advocated segment of the society is the real people and the advocate is the only real representative of that people are certain indicatives of populism.

Based upon the demonic imagination of liberal elites in the eyes of populists, populism, in a sense, has a revolutionary mission that takes the power from the elite and brings it to the people. However, the notion of ‘the people’ for the populist logic does not contain all the citizens. Right at this point, the discriminating and polarizing features of populism become perceivable. As several scholars indicate, the survival of populism depends on social and political antagonism. In this direction, as Mudde (2004, 2013) points out, populists are highly tended to create an ‘unbridgeable cleavage’ (Pappas, 2019) between the ‘real’ people and corrupt elite through the perception of ‘us and them’. For the populist mentality, the real people are

“a mythical and constructed sub-set of the whole population” (Mudde, 2004, p. 546).

The individuals of the real people are portrayed as moral and patriotic, and it is claimed that they are the silent majority live under the oppression of the minority of the liberal elite. For sure, on the other hand, the populist perception about the corrupt segment of the society does not consist only of a group of political rivals. Since populists claim that they are the advocates of the real people, the ones who are in a different line from them, regardless of whether they are supporters of the political elite or not, might be labeled as corrupt, immoral and even, traitor.

In persuading people to their claims, populists’ most useful weapon is communication with an incentive and internalizable discourse in the eyes of the majority

of the people. This is actually why populism is identified with demagogy. As Cardoso (2006) indicates, populists are mostly good communicators, and they are also good at exploiting conjunctural economic and political failures. Therefore, populist movements are, in particular, likely to appear in times of crisis. Populist leaders generally track a rhetoric in which, on the one hand, there is a dramatization of the status of the so called real people vis-à-vis the so called others – particularly the liberal elite –, and on the other hand, there is a promotion of pipe dreams such as political and social equality, economic welfare and expansion of opportunities for direct democratic participation by emphasizing popular sovereignty.

Since populists' aim is to gain the support of the majority, they use an easily understandable and, at the same time, a stimulant language. Riedel (2017), in this respect, defines the populist rhetoric as:

“catchy and attractive based on emotional and irrational grounds, the longing for simple solutions to complicated problems, and a direct connection to the will of the majority” (p. 289).

In addition to this, Mudde (2013) asserts that:

“populism is often defined primarily as a specific communication style that is overly emotional and simplistic, pandering to ‘the common man’ by using his language and symbols” (pp. 2-3).

In the sense of being an attraction center in the eyes of the voters, populists usually give promises about economy such as increase in GDP and decrease in unemployment rate; while, on the other hand, they use a provocative and antagonistic language through emotional sentiments which are mostly based on nationalism and religion for the purpose of creating a social cleavage and an artificial majority through that cleavage. As an example, the conservative AKP (Justice and Development Party) government in Turkey frequently makes propaganda through the religion-based headscarf issue against the secular opposition parties, since, during the government of secular parties, wearing headscarf was not allowed in some places such as schools, universities and public institutions. Thus, while removing the ban on wearing headscarf gained the religious

section's support for the AKP government, it also provided a trump card against the secular opposition.

Consequently, although different populist political actors or movements may differ from each other in terms of the comprehensive ideologies they follow, populism, in general, has some constant and typical characteristics. As one of those characteristics, populism can be approached as a movement against the political status quo that relies on liberal democratic principles. From this point of view, anti-institutionalism is also one of the typical characteristics of populism. The anti-institutional character of populism is not only against the supervisory established institutions of liberal democracy such as judicial and legislative bodies, but also against the party system in order to present a charismatic leader, and thus, to break the bureaucratic procedures and bring democracy to a more personal field. In line with this purpose, by means of creating a cleavage within the society through evoking antagonistic and discriminating feelings, populists aim to form their own majority which will be enough for their coming to power thanks to the majoritarian characteristic of contemporary democracy. After coming to power, populists maintain to lean on this characteristic of democracy with a plebiscitary attitude in order to consolidate their presence in power. That is why populist regimes frequently appeal to referendums as in Venezuela under the Hugo Chávez administration and Bolivia under the Evo Morales administration. Although such an attitude seems like a 'pure' form of democracy without any mediation between the ruler and the ruled, and with the direct participation of citizens to the policy making process, it may most probably – especially with hegemonic desires of the political authority – cause what Tocqueville calls 'the tyranny of the majority', as stressed by Schleifer (2012), by ignoring one of the basic principles of democracy, pluralism.

2.3. Populists in Power

After defining populism theoretically, in this part, it will be focused on the matter of populists in power, and of their proximity and distance to democracy and authoritarianism from a theoretical perspective.

2.3.1. Democracy and populists in power

It is apparent that populism arises from democracy. It owes its existence to the majoritarian aspect of democracy. Ironically, however, the populists in power usually seem that they are seeking for destroying, or at least, eroding it. The fact is that populists use democracy in order to break the status quo which is in favor of the liberal elite while they are struggling for power; and while they are in power, they use it in order to construct a new status quo in their favor. Such a relation between populism and democracy gives rise to the question of ‘is populism democratic or not?’

As indicated above, there is no place for political liberalism in the populist logic. Therefore, it is obvious that liberal democracy does not fit populism. Hence, populism is usually considered as illiberal democracy which contains regular elections and universal suffrage, but lacks the mechanism of checks and balances, the rule of law and several freedoms. However, Müller (2016) asserts that this definition is illusive and an obstacle to understand the threat of populism for democracy since it, in a sense, presents a justification for actually anti-democratic populist regimes by claiming that there is still democracy just without liberalism. Whereas, a healthy, stable and durable democratic regime cannot be regarded as without liberal principles; or in other words, treating democracy and liberalism as the pillars independent of each other might have eroding effects on both. Although these pillars are generally analyzed as not only independent of each other, but, even, paradoxical, Abts and Rummens (2007) think that they have checking roles on each other. As they assert, the liberal aspect and, as a result of it, individual rights are important to guarantee the diversity of society, and to prevent the tyranny of the majority; on the other hand, the democratic aspect and, as a result of it, the principle of the sovereignty of the people can prevent potential legislative regulations which serve for the interests of specific groups.

In a similar vein, Canovan (1999) refers that:

“Beetham ... stresses that many aspects of the liberal heritage are actually fundamental to the persistence of democracy itself, among them freedom of expression and the rule of law” (p. 7).

She explicates democracy as composed of two faces, which she calls redemptive – by implying the democratic pillar – and pragmatic – by implying the liberal pillar, and she perceives populism as arisen from the gap and tension between the two faces by exploiting the redemptive aspect against the pragmatic aspect. What is the point here that I want to emphasize is that Canovan does not make different conceptualizations as liberal and illiberal democracy. Although she indicates that the democratic and liberal aspects might have incompatibilities with each other, they are still the constituents of democracy as a whole.

In this manner, I think, the problem, that Müller remarks, indeed arises from different perceptions on the concept of democracy. Therefore, there should be a constant definition of democracy, because otherwise, the practices of the political authorities, which are essentially undemocratic, anti-democratic, or even, authoritarian, might be hidden behind alleged democratic reasons by stretching or constricting the limits of democracy just as, in a similar manner, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) advert:

“One of the great ironies of how democracies die is that the very defense of democracy is often used as a pretext for its subversion.” (p. 113),

and as Pabst (2016) states:

“a purported defence of democracy is itself deployed to justify the suspending of democratic decision-making and civil liberties.” (p. 93).

Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) define democracy as:

“a system of government with regular, free and fair elections, in which all adult citizens have the right to vote and possess basic civil liberties such as freedom of speech and association” (p. 8).

While agreeing with the definition of Levitsky and Ziblatt, I find necessary to underline the requirement of the equally distribution of such liberties in order to hinder majoritarianism and enrich pluralism which, in my conceptualization of democracy, is one of the basic and indispensable principles of democracy, because as Urbinati (1998) emphasizes:

“democracy means not mass mobilization or mass organization, but equal freedom of expression of each as single” (p. 121).

In other words, if such liberties are utilizable only for a specific group of the society, which is composed of the supporters of the political authority, the principle of pluralism would still be crushing under the majoritarian democracy that serves for the good of populist rulers.

As a matter of fact, however, such liberties are beside the point for the populist understanding of democracy. The only thing that populists in power care about in behalf of democracy is the presence of elections that will keep them in power within the frame of the status quo they have constructed. So, the presence of elections, regardless of whether they are free and fair or not, is enough for the populist logic to, as Urbinati (1998) mentions, play a democratic role especially in the societies which are not yet democratic. However, she argues that:

“This, ..., does not prove that populism is democratic, nor that it may contribute to improving the democratic tenor of already democratic societies.” (p. 116).

That is to say, elections alone do not bring democracy. Without homogenized distribution of the right to freedom of expression and equal conditions for all political campaigns, and with the use of state institutions and media, within the frame of a hegemonic and monopolistic mentality, in order to restrain oppositional voices since they are allegedly illegitimate and corrupt, elections are nothing more than a formality. And such conditions are so likely to appear, as will be discussed based on selected cases, in the populist status quos which have actually been formed as specific regime types via institutional and constitutional reforms thanks to the support of the majority. The way of ruling under such conditions with the claim of being the only true and legitimate representative of the people, however, as also indicated by Diamond (2017), means ignoring of political liberties, social diversity and the principle of pluralism, therefore causes democratic erosion.

Nonetheless, the truth is that populism has a legitimate membership in the democratic club (Riedel, 2017) as long as, at least, democracy is based upon majority rule.

However, the critical and dangerous point, which is actually quite obvious, is that the populists in power are intentioned to

“replace majority rule by the rule of the majority” (Kriesi, 2018, p. 20).

In this direction, Riedel (2017), by referring to Rosanvallon (2006), asserts that populism is

“a perversion of the ideals and procedures of democracy” (Riedel, 2017, p. 293).

Yet, even if it is unsuitable and, even, dangerous for democracy, populism is unavoidable in the context of democracy. In that vein, Canovan (1999) likens populism to a shadow that follows democracy. With reference to Canovan’s metaphor, Arditi (2007) describes populism as a ‘spectre of democracy’ that

“can be something that both accompanies democracy and haunts it” (p. 51).

I think, from a different point of view, it is needed to emphasize that populism is not undemocratic or anti-democratic by nature. What make populism the anomalous child of democracy are the political actors with hegemonic desires who use populism as a means to lure the people, and thus, to get the power and, even, the sovereignty, which actually come from and belong to the people, from them by their consent. Whereas, populism as an idea can also have a positive and corrective role on democracy as Kriesi (2018) indicates. He states that:

“Populists may develop a corrective force, especially when they represent demands and claims of structurally important groups which have been neglected or ‘depoliticized’ by the established mainstream parties” (Kriesi, 2018, p. 19).

Furthermore, although plebiscites within the frame of the populist mentality may cause a violation of the principle of pluralism and the tyranny of the majority, Kriesi asserts that:

“referenda about highly salient issues that preoccupy the public may bring citizens into politics who normally do not care about it, because they perceive the issue-specific vote as an opportunity to have a voice” (Kriesi, 2018, p. 19).

That is to say that the nature of plebiscite, that is one of the essential mechanisms of populism, actually does not have an eroding influence on democracy; but depending on the intended use of it, it may turn to a gun against democracy.

Despite the presence of the populist demagogues with hegemonic desires, which is what makes populism a threat against democracy, in power, it might still be possible to inhibit democratic erosion. What are needed, in order to do it, are strong and stable democratic institutions and the people's experience and adoption of democracy with the all essential principles of it. As long as these requirements are fulfilled, institutional mechanisms do not let the hegemonic populists in power concentrate all the power and dominate all the decision-making processes. This is why, as mentioned above, populists are not comfortable with democratic institutions. However, although these institutions and their mechanisms constitute a barrier in front of the hegemonic practices of the populists in power, they are not insurmountable. Therefore, even if the populists in power find a way to overcome that barrier, the people, in whom democratic principles have taken root, do not give their consent to them.

However, in the countries in which there is not enough democratic maturity at the social and institutional levels, democracy is more fragile and open to abuse. Therefore, populism and populists are more likely to appear and reign in such countries by addressing the people's national and religious feelings and, as Constant (1988) indicates, the personal pleasures and interests through the promises in the field of economy even if at the cost of democratic liberties and despite the risk of the potential emergence of authoritarianism.

2.3.2. Authoritarianism and populists in power

As it turns out, democracy – together with its all basic principles and mechanisms – is, in fact, nothing more than a means to come to power for populists. Therefore, when they come to power with a respectable support of the people, democracy is usually the first thing to be sacrificed on the track of the consolidation of their presence in power. Hence, it is almost indisputable that the populists in power who possess the support of the

majority constitute a potential for the erosion of democracy. Based on this and, also, on the revolutionist character of populist movements, it can also be interpreted, as Gamboa (2017) does, that populism and the democratic erosion it causes have a transitional mission over democratic regimes towards autocratization, authoritarianization, and, even, totalitarianization.

Before going over the intersection points and incompatibilities of populism with authoritarianism and totalitarianism for the purpose of clarifying the route of in-power populism, it is worth briefly mentioning what authoritarianism and totalitarianism are. Based predominantly on the conceptualization of Linz (2000), authoritarianism can be defined as a political system with a quite low level of political pluralism – that is almost only perceivable in local-level politics, without an original specific guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without a considerable level of political mobilization, and in which there is a rule of a specific leader or a small group of people who possess open-ended limits of power and usually resort to repression in various ways as a control mechanism over the society. Totalitarianism, on the other hand, is more daring in repressing the society, especially in terms of the use of force. Differently from authoritarian regimes, in totalitarian regimes, the policy making process and even the society's way of life are shaped by a specific ideology, and there is no toleration for divergence, and hence, no political pluralism, while mobilization is one of the most used methods together with the use of force.

In this context, it is obviously possible to associate populism, in some ways, with authoritarianism and totalitarianism that are, one can say that, the ultimate goals of it. However, since populism and populists are backed by the majoritarian characteristic of democracy and therefore need the popular consent, such a transition cannot happen overnight as in military coups that are explicitly undemocratic. Rather, as Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) and Gamboa (2017) point out, processes of both the erosion of democracy and the transition from democracy to authoritarianism happen slowly and in steps that are barely visible. In a similar manner, Diamond (2017) defines those populist-led transition processes as the processes of “creeping authoritarianism” in which, he refers:

“the elected ruler gradually eviscerates political pluralism and institutional checks and balances until the irreducible minimum condition for democracy – the ability of the people to replace their leaders in free and fair elections – is gone” (Diamond, 2017).

In order to clearly define the final point of the steps which are taken by populist rulers for the purpose of pushing the political regime from democracy to authoritarianism, some scholars prefer to develop or address some specific concepts, such as “competitive authoritarianism” (Levitsky and Loxton, 2013) and “authoritarian democracy” (Riedel, 2017), in order to underline the differences of the populist version of authoritarianism from the other types of authoritarianism. Since, as indicated above, populists owe both their existences and survivals in power to democracy, one can say that they always need, at least, the symbolic presence of democracy particularly within the limits of the plebiscitary mentality. This is why Levitsky and Loxton (2013) see populism as the primary reason for the emergence of competitive authoritarianism which is a hybrid regime differently from outright authoritarian regimes. By considering it as the destination of populism, they define competitive authoritarianism as:

“hybrid regimes in which formal democratic institutions are viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbent abuse skews the playing field to such an extent that the opposition’s ability to compete is seriously compromised” (Levitsky and Loxton, 2013, p. 108).

So, even if there are elections and competitiveness on paper, they are not under fair conditions since the political authority uses the state resources and means against its competitors. In this regard, they elaborate their definition for the concept as:

“Although government critics are not violently repressed as they were under many Latin American dictatorships during the 1970s, they face various forms of harassment, including: surveillance and blackmail; ‘legal’ persecution for defamation, tax violations, or corruption; attacks by government-sponsored mobs; and occasional arrest or exile. In addition, incumbent abuse of state resources and co-optation of private media skews access to finance and major media” (Levitsky and Loxton, 2013, p. 108).

As another approach about the final point of the in-power populism, Finchelstein (2017) asserts that populism led to the emergence of a new type of democracy in the form of an authoritarian regime. While emphasizing the anti-institutionalist characteristics of populism and authoritarianism as a common ground, he also points out populism's anti-violence stance and advocacy for democracy differently from authoritarianism and totalitarianism. Finchelstein, furthermore, implies that there is a relative respect for the rule of law in populist regimes when compared to authoritarian regimes – especially to the ones which are under the rule of a dictator. In this context, he argues that:

“populism does not destroy democratic representation nor fully present itself as above the rule of law” (Finchelstein, 2017, p. 183).

Although, however, populist rulers cannot reject the rule of law outrightly and daringly since it is one of the liberal principles of democracy they had arisen from, and, therefore, cannot overtly insist that their dictum is above the laws, their claim to represent the will of the people, or, even, to be the voice of the people makes their decisions – which are allegedly taken in the name of the people – in a sense unquestionable, because whoever objects or questions their decisions can be accused of questioning the public will or objecting the good of the people. In this regard, one can say that populists can easily overcome the institutional barrier arising from the principle of the rule of law by way of their profession, demagogy, instead of an overt dictation. That is to say that even if the ways they use are different, the destinations of populism and authoritarianism are not so different from each other.

Considering the fact that both populist regimes and authoritarian regimes are against institutionalism, Urbinati (1998) makes a connection between populism and authoritarianism by asserting that populism is despotic since it brings an unmediated relation between the ruler and the people that creates

“a face-to-face and direct relationship which is founded upon a hierarchical position of the stronger over the weaker, with no other legitimization than the actual and explicit will and force of the one over the other” (Urbinati, 1998, p. 117).

In a similar manner with the argument of Urbinati, Rensmann (2018) explains the hierarchical relation between the ruler and the subjects in the populist regimes – particularly in Europe, that is due to the lack of institutional mediation between the two, as a result of the authoritarian syndrome of populism with reference to the authoritarian past of the European continent.

On the other side, however, considering the populist anti-institutionalism as being totally against the democratic institutions might be misleading. Rather, what populists are actually against, as indicated above, is the established status quo which is guaranteed by the democratic state institutions and, according to the populists' claim, serves for the liberal elite. Therefore, it can be said that rather than abolishing the democratic institutions, the main target of the populists in power is to capture the democratic institutions by appointing the ones who are loyal to them to those institutions at first, and then, to reform them for the purpose of, as Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) indicate, wielding them as political weapons against opponents. On such a way of authoritarianization, they underline the paradox that

“democracy’s assassins use the very institutions of democracy – gradually, subtly, and even legally – to kill it” (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p. 9).

In addition to the populists' actions of capturing and making use of state institutions including judicial bodies, election boards and all the bureaucratic institutions, Müller (2016) also makes mention of exploiting of all the facilities of the state, clientelism, and of repressing civil society in order to create a pro-government civil society. These three actions are highly similar to the authoritarian practices as he points out, and also to totalitarian practices. For both authoritarian and totalitarian regimes – regardless of whether there is a rule of one-man or one-party – it can be said, without any doubt, that the greatest aim is to fully dominate the state, and even, especially for the totalitarian logic, to become the state itself by taking over and monopolizing the authority on decision making, including the decisions about the usage of the economic and military resources of the state, in order to be able to establish a control mechanism over the people.

As for clientelism, one can say that it is one of the abuses of the taken over and monopolized powers. Therefore, it is possible to liken this populist practice to the carrot and stick method which is highly used by totalitarian regimes for the purpose of keeping the loyalists loyal and gathering new loyalists. The similarity on this matter is especially perceivable when it comes to the field of law. By referring to Weyland's (2013) statement of

“For my friends, everything; for my enemies, the law” (Weyland, 2013),

Müller (2016) depicts the populist mass clientelism as:

“Only some of the people should get to enjoy the full protection of the laws; those who do not belong to the people or, for that matter, who might be suspected of actively working against the people, should be treated harshly” (Müller, 2016, p. 46).

In a similar vein, Linz (2000) indicates that in totalitarianism, the law is not objective, but subjective. It is more decisive who the defendant is than his actions.

Despite the commonalities between the mentalities of populism, totalitarianism and authoritarianism in terms of such practices, however, the only nuance is that, unlike authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, since they need the popular consent, populists need to legitimize their actions – particularly by referring to their most classic claim that they are the only real representatives of the people, and whatever they do is for the good of the people. In this way, as Arditi (2007) remarks, their undemocratic behavior and undermining practices over the rule of law do not necessarily erode their legitimacy or popular support. Additionally, he asserts, by referring to populists, that:

“With their penchant for demagogic claims, they often invoke the trope of corrupt or self-serving elites that have lost touch with the people, or prey on people's fears by claiming that stricter policing and immigration controls will solve economic and social problems. This, of course, requires a strong and decisive leadership ... but this is often an alibi for authoritarian practices” (Arditi, 2007, p. 53).

Beside Arditi's statement, Abts and Rummens (2007) explain the gradual path of populism to authoritarianism as:

“Populist leaders who advocate the rule of the people and claim to embody the will of the people in their own person have to consider their political opponents, parliament and the constitution as obstacles to be ignored or even removed. If they are able to acquire sufficient power, such leaders are therefore likely to try to bypass essential parts of the representative and constitutional checks and balances. Moreover, the survival of such a regime depends on the successful preservation of the fictitious image of the people-as-one that brought them to power. This requires a continuous effort to delegitimize all possible opponents and to suppress all possible political divergence. In the end, a populist regime can, therefore, only survive if it becomes authoritarian and despotic.” (Abts and Rummens, 2007, p. 421).

All in all, overcoming the institutional and constitutional mechanisms alone is not enough for populists, and one can say that it is the first step they take in order to pave the way for the upcoming steps. Due to the need for political legitimacy and popular support, they also need to expand their majority as much as possible through a totalizing and monist manner. This is why one of the most insisted claims of populists is on the idea of the unified people. In this explicitly anti-pluralist way, it is easy to morally demonize and discriminate the opponents, which will highly likely be turned into legal charges and prosecution cases by the populist political authority as a result of the concentrated and monopolized power they possess over the institutions and above the liberal democratic principles.

On the basis of their anti-pluralist characteristics, Halmai (2019) makes a connection between the populist regimes with authoritarian aspirations and authoritarian regimes by arguing that:

“populist authoritarians are as anti-pluralist as their non-populist counterparts.”; and by pointing out that “The difference is ... rather rhetorical. The first refers to ‘pure people’, the second to the Aryan Volk, as the German Nazis, or to the ‘proletarian working class’ as the Communists, but both have in mind the exclusion of minorities in societies, including religious, ethnic and other minorities such as migrants in the case of populist authoritarians” (Halmai, 2019, p. 301).

Likewise, Rensmann (2018) strikingly correlates the fascist mentality of authoritarianism with the current populism. He argues that populist leaders, just like the authoritarian leaders, reduce the problems of the society to the level of individuals who are labeled as the others, by referring to foreigners – especially to immigrants. Thus, they can mobilize the people against those specific targets by making them scapegoats who are responsible for the problems of the society, and morally legitimize their anti-pluralist attitude that is needed for liquidating any different voices on the way to consolidation of their position in power.

At the point which Halmai and Rensmann emphasize, populists' discriminatory and repressive attitude, by going beyond the political extent, contains also social, religious and identity issues. In this sense, one can say that even beyond authoritarianism, populism's final destination is likely totalitarianism, since both, in the grand scheme of things, aim not just to form a government, but an ideal people which is ruled by the one and only ideal leader, by the way of ignoring all the political and social diversities in the society. In this regard, Urbinati (1998) defines populism's extreme consequence as transforming

“a political community into a corporate household-like entity, where class and ideological differences are denied and mastered in the attempt to fulfill the myth of a comprehensive totality of state and society” (Urbinati, 1998, p. 110).

Hence, as Linz (2000) characterizes some political systems' pre-totalitarian phases as an authoritarian situation, since, as he refers:

“the process of establishing a truly totalitarian system is not achieved at the day of takeover of power” (Linz, 2000, p. 177);

and as Abts and Rummens (2007) argue that even if an authoritarian and despotic regime

“would succeed in eliminating all political diversity, other forms of cultural, social or economic diversity would remain and would put constant pressure on the political sphere and on the image of a homogenous political body” (p. 421),

by indicating what Lefort (1986) asserts, as a result of this, that in order to eliminate all types of diversity in a society, such a regime inevitably transforms into a totalitarian regime; it is possible to deduce that the hegemonic populist regimes turn the democratic system into a specific type of authoritarianism at first, and then convert it to a sort of totalitarian system.

While discussing populists' totalitarian-like effort to create a unified people, it is worth to touch upon the differences in approaches to this effort by taking the right-wing populism on the one hand, and the left-wing populism on the other. Particularly based on the articles of Rhodes-Purdy (2015) and Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013), it can be generalized that the left-wing populist regimes, which are mostly located in the Latin America region, are relatively more inclusionary and participatory; while the right-wing populist regimes, especially the ones in Europe, are more exclusionary in terms of political, social and economic criterions. In other words, while the left-wing populists try to totalize the people by embracing and including as many people as possible into their majority domain, the right-wing populists generally prefer creating and consolidating their majority by keeping minority groups out of it.

Rhodes-Purdy (2015) explains the politically inclusionary and participatory attitude of the left-wing populist regimes with their purpose of legitimizing their national level hegemony by enfranchising limited-scale local level political participation in which their predominance is not threatened or diminished. He, additionally, emphasizes that one can interpret this attitude of such regimes as

“either vehicles for clientelism, ways to circumvent representative institutions, or mechanisms for enforcing loyalty at the grassroots” (Rhodes-Purdy, 2015, p. 417).

Besides, since the possibility of the existence of any other option is almost utterly eliminated and therefore participating in politics actually means participating in the incumbent party in such regimes, in this way, they can also instill in the people a sense of belonging to the regime by commissioning them in the party as the totalitarian regimes do.

As for the right-wing populist regimes, especially the ones in Europe which are in a significant uptrend, one can say that they are much more discriminative in comparison with their left-wing counterparts. I think, this situation can be explained by two primary reasons. The first is the remnants of fascism come from the fascist past of the continent, and the second, which can also be perceived as having a triggering effect on the remnants of fascism, is the immigration issue that Europe is facing. Such populists, both before and after coming to power, are usually inclined to introduce immigrants as the ones who will grab the job opportunities of the citizens and be an economic burden to the state. In this way, through a quite demagogic attitude, they can appeal to the ones they claim as “the real people”. Along the same line, as a result of the discriminative attitude of such regimes, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013) argue that:

“One of the key aspects of the populist radical right programme is welfare chauvinism, where a fairly generous welfare state is generally supported for the ‘own people’ but ‘aliens’ (such as immigrants, refugees or Roma) are to be excluded from most of the provisions” (p. 160);

while, as they indicate, in the Latin American left-wing populist regimes, the focus is on creating good living conditions for the people without any ethnic, religious or identity discrimination, but on condition that to be ideologically on the same line with the political authority (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013).

Consequently, in terms of the destinations aimed to be arrived, and of most of the methods used on that course, populism has resemblance to authoritarianism and totalitarianism in many aspects despite some differentiation points, such as populism’s limited and necessary democratic stance. In this respect, it can be said that the populist regimes with concentrated powers and a consolidated presence in power as a result of the popular support they possess are in an idiosyncratic position between authoritarianism and totalitarianism. Nevertheless, since it would be prejudiced to accept all the populist governments as in line with authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, it would be useful to apply a litmus test, like the one that suggested by Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) in order to crystallize the authoritarian tendencies of rulers, to the would-be authoritarian populists. According to them, if a politician

“1) rejects, in words or action, the democratic rules of the game, 2) denies the legitimacy of opponents, 3) tolerates or encourages violence, or 4) indicates a willingness to curtail the civil liberties of opponents, including the media” (p. 26),

it means that he shows symptoms of authoritarianism. And as they indicate, and also in the light of the discussion above, it is more likely to see that the populists in power with the support of the majority test positive.

Besides these, it is also worth mentioning that, as one of their most prominent efforts arises from their anti status quoist and revolutionist character, the hegemonic populists usually tend to constitutionalize their undemocratic and illiberal practices via constitutional amendments by making use of the majority support they have through plebiscites. Thus, they can legitimize the suppression over the opposition, and consolidate their hegemonic status above the society.

2.4. Populist Constitutions

Constitutions are the guarantee of democracy and freedoms in democratic countries. However, under the rule of populist hegemons – who are, one can say, pseudo-democrats – they might turn into weapons against those who are out of the populist description of “the real people”, such as minorities, immigrants and opponents. Just like the method of pervading the state institutions by appointing loyalists in order to get rid of institutional barriers and to use them for silencing oppositional voices, populists usually appeal to the people, in which they already have a majority support, by referendums for constitutional amendments which may include articles from extending or making uncertain the presidential terms, to paving the way for charging oppositional activities.

Concerning the ruling populists’ appeal to the people for the purpose of reforming the constitution, Mudde (2013) points out the outsider identity of them. Since, in democracies, the populist outsiders are generally strangers to the components of usual politics, such as the established democratic institutions, as Mudde (2013) indicates, they

lack support in the branches of government and, accordingly, face institutional barriers in front of their policy-making maneuvers. Therefore, under such conditions, the populists in power generally react by attempting to neutralize those barriers by directly appealing to the people in a constitutional referendum (Mudde, 2013) in order to be able to concentrate all the political power in their own hands by, usually, as Pappas (2019) refers, means of strengthening the executive organ against the legislative and judiciary organs.

I think, it is possible to put an interpretation on the projected populist constitutions that will take shape as a result of the desired amendments, as Müller (2016) does too, that those constitutions are for legalizing the morally constructed populist ideas. As Halmai (2019) argues that:

“The populist approach to constitutionalism appears as an instrumental one that uses nationalist and religious definitions of the nation to promote an ultimately authoritarian project” (p. 310);

and as Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) claim that the populist constitutional amendments

“are often carried out under the guise of some public good, while in reality they are stacking the deck in favor of incumbents” (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p. 107);

hegemonic populist governments are likely to try to get the consent of the people for reforming the constitution by asserting that the existing constitution does not fit the moral and national values of the people and needs to be reformed. Similar to the argument of Halmai, Blokker (2019) underlines the instrumentalist approach of populists towards constitutions, while implying that the populist constitutional amendments lead to breakdown of the rule of law, by indicating that populists emphasize

“a view of (public) law as an instrument in realizing the higher ends of the majority, in contrast to the idea of the law as an independent force in democratic politics and as a vehicle for participation and emancipation.” (Blokker, 2019, p. 552).

And he adds:

“This means frequent, non-transparent, executive-driven engagement with constitutional change, often justified in terms of reclaiming the law for the majority” (p. 552).

Furthermore, hegemonic populists can promise certainty and stability to the people through the condition of realization of their projected constitutional amendments, since the new form of the constitution will enable them to eliminate the uncertainty and complexity of the liberal democratic system, while their decisions will become almost absolute. In this sense, one can make an inference that such constitutional reforms are the steps towards the populist’s promise of creation of and transition into a “real democracy” from liberal democracy, which is so-called the corrupt version of democracy, by restricting political liberties that are, in fact, essential for a true democracy.

2.5. Populism between Democracy and Authoritarianism

As a concept, populism has its own perception on the concept of democracy. In this respect, although, as mentioned above, it, by its nature, does not pose danger for democracy, it is its use by the political actors with hegemonic desires, when they come to power with the enough support of the people, as a means to make their way to realize their aims that turns populism into a danger for democracy. In this sense, it is not the concept of populism, but the populists who use populism in order to exploit democracy are, in fact, the threat for democracy. Their desire of domination drags democratic order into erosion. And such a scenario unavoidably results in authoritarianization where democracy remains only on paper as a legitimizing element.

CHAPTER 3: CASE ANALYSIS: VENEZUELA UNDER HUGO CHÁVEZ

3.1. The Causes of the Emergence and Rise of Populism in Venezuela

In this part, before going into a detailed analysis about the position of the Hugo Chávez administration in Venezuela between democracy and authoritarianism, the causes of the emergence and rise of populism in the country will be portrayed as a historical background of the case under two subtitles. Firstly, the situation of politics in the country during the period between transition to democracy and Hugo Chávez's inauguration will be depicted. And secondly, there will be a depiction of Chávez's personal background, and of the reasons of the rise of populism in Venezuela, starting with his appearance on the stage of politics.

3.1.1. Democratization and the period of two-party domination

Venezuela is a Latin American country with a federal presidential republic system. It was a Spanish colony during the period between 1522 and 1811. Despite the declaration of independence and proclamation of the First Republic of Venezuela in 1811, the country's transition to democracy has occurred long after that year. Venezuela was ruled by authoritarian and dictatorial regimes, that were highly prevalent in the Latin America's political history, until 1958 – except some short-term efforts of democratization towards 1958 – together with high levels of political instability. After the collapse of the military junta regime led by Pérez Jiménez in 1958, the substantial democratic life in Venezuela has started with the agreement among 'Acción Democrática' (Democratic Action, AD), 'Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente' (Independent Political Electoral Organization Committee, COPEI) and 'Unión Republicana Democrática' (The Democratic Republican Union, URD) which are the political parties founded in the 1940s.

In the period between 1958 and 1998, AD and COPEI dominated the Venezuelan politics at both local and national levels. Between those years, 9 out of 12 presidents were elected from the candidates of these two parties. As the number one oil rich country in the world, Venezuela's economy has been excessively relying on oil revenues. Despite some governmental attempts to diversify the country's economic activities in the first years after 1958, Venezuela's dependence on oil revenues continued to a large extent. With the extreme increase in the international oil prices in the 1970s, the then administration under the presidency of Carlos Andrés Pérez (AD) decided to initiate the import substitution industrialization (ISI) model and nationalize the oil production sector.

Despite the initial success of it – and also, although, as Maya (2011) refers, its contribution to consolidation of the democratic regime in the country even after a long standing authoritarian tradition of the region – in the early days, the ISI model caused an economic crisis in the long run because of the high expenditures of nationalization. In addition to this, with the dramatic decrease in the oil prices in the 1980s, the economic crisis accelerated and the inflation rate and indebtedness of the state escalated. Hence, in his second term, which started in 1989, Pérez shifted to a neoliberal economic policy including privatization of public utilities and getting loan from the International Monetary Fund.

The changes in the economic policy worsened the already problematic situation of Venezuela's economy and gave rise to new price increases – for instance, in the gasoline prices – that led to a wide-scale popular uprising in 1989, called the 'Caracazo', which resulted in hundreds of deaths. Besides these, the chaotic situation in the country was not limited to the economic crisis. Particularly with the neoliberal-oriented transition, the legitimacy of the established political system and the parties began to be questioned by the people, and some politicians began to be accused of corruption. As a striking example, president Pérez was found guilty of the corruption allegations against him and removed from the office in 1993.

Table 1. Has Corruption Increased or Decreased in Venezuela? (Source: Latinobarómetro, 1995-1998)

	1995	1996	1997	1998
Increased a lot	87%	93%	94%	94%
Increased a little	4%	3%	3%	2%
Remained the same	4%	3%	2%	3%
Decreased a little	2%	1%	0%	0%
Decreased a lot	2%	0%	0%	0%
Don't know	1%	0%	0%	0%
No answer/ Refused	0%	0%	0%	0%
(N)	1,200	1,500	1,200	1,200

In the following years, as the data of Latinobarómetro show (see Table 1.), particularly on the basis of the corruption issue, the public confidence of the Venezuelan people in politicians in the then existing established political order kept decreasing which, moreover, as De la Torre (2016) indicates, led to the emergence of an entire crisis of political representation. He argues that:

“Traditional political parties and the institutional framework of democracy were in crisis. Parties were perceived as instruments of local and foreign elites that implemented neoliberal policies that increased social inequality.” (De la Torre, 2016, p. 124).

Furthermore, based upon the neoliberal-oriented shift, De la Torre (2016) asserts that a view that Venezuela is getting under the wardship of neoliberal and capitalist organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and the

United States appeared among the Venezuelan people. This was another cause of public unrest, because such a submissive policy had never taken place in Venezuela since the beginning of the democratic regime. As a different perspective, on the other hand, Mainwaring (2012), based on the arguments of Morgan (2011) and Seawright (2012), claims that the economic crisis situation and the corruption allegations were not the only reasons for the slide of the party system and the system of representation into collapse. By attribution to the ideas of Morgan and Seawright, he indicates that the decreasing, and even almost the lack of, ideological divergence between the AD and COPEI, as the two dominant political parties, with the shift of the AD – which was a center-left party – to the right and its approaching to the Christian democratic COPEI was the direct reason for the crisis of political representation.

Table 2. Satisfaction with Democracy in Venezuela (Source: Latinobarómetro, 1995-1998)

	1995	1996	1997	1998
Very satisfied	11%	8%	12%	13%
Rather satisfied	25%	22%	23%	22%
Not very satisfied	38%	41%	42%	39%
Not at all satisfied	22%	27%	21%	25%
Don't know	3%	1%	0%	0%
No answer/ Refused	1%	0%	1%	0%
(N)	1,200	1,500	1,200	1,200

In sum, all the given crises and corruption cases created a discontent among the Venezuelan people not only against the politicians and the political parties, but also, as

Table 2 shows, against the then existing institutional system of democracy, which was predominantly based on bureaucratic procedures and indirect representative style of democracy. Hence, given the social, political and economic conditions of the time, as Maya (2011) indicates, there was

“a wide spectrum of opportunities for emerging actors and alternative sociopolitical proposals” (Maya, 2011, p. 219).

Thereby, considering its characteristic that feeds on crises, there was a very favorable environment for a populist challenge that Hugo Chávez subtly took advantage of.

3.1.2. Hugo Chávez and the rise of populism in Venezuela

Hugo Chávez was born in 1954. After graduating from high school, he started the Venezuelan Academy of Military Sciences at the age of 17, and following his graduation from the academy, his military career started.

“In Venezuela, military governments were the rule until the 1950s, and during the period of guerilla insurgency in the 1960s, sectors of the left penetrated the armed forces, establishing long-lasting roots.” (Maya, 2011, p. 215).

“For these reasons, within the barracks, groups dedicated to political discussion and criticism were formed early on, as were certain conspiratorial groups aiming to overthrow the political system.” (Maya, 2011, p. 215).

In the wake of the rising corruption allegations and signs of a neoliberal-oriented transition in the 1980s, Chávez, as a military officer, decided to found a clandestine organization within the army called – with a dedication to Simón Bolívar, who was a historical national hero for Venezuelans – the ‘Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement 200 (MBR 200)’ in 1983 based on patriotic ideals and against political corruption. By founding the MBR 200, Chávez started to lay the foundations of his ideological course, which would later be called by the name of ‘Bolivarianism’, especially after his coming to power with the so-called ‘Bolivarian Revolution’ in 1999. His Bolivarian ideology

mainly was a stance against neoliberalism, imperialism and the supposedly corrupt political elites. In more detail, for Chávez's Bolivarianism, De la Torre (2017) makes a depiction that:

“Chávez had a sense of mission to liberate his country and Latin America from US imperialism and the elites that serve its interests. His ideology and project of Bolivarianism were built on leftist and nationalist portrayals of Simón Bolívar as an anti-imperialist hero. Accordingly, he promised to follow in the liberator's footsteps and promote the second independence of Latin America. His Bolivarian Revolution was conceived as a project of democratic transformation based on the rejection of neoliberal policies, of the surrendering of national sovereignty to US controlled organizations like the IMF.” (p. 1273).

As a result of the state of affairs in Venezuela, the Chávez-led Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement 200 attempted to make a coup d'état against the Pérez administration in 1992. However, the coup attempt failed, and Chávez and the other participants in the coup attempt were imprisoned. Nonetheless, for his future-oriented ideals, Chávez took advantage of the situation on his own behalf very well. He

“assumed responsibility for the coup and conceded defeat, but he promised to continue the struggle for political and economic change, converting himself into a symbol of steadfast opposition to the status quo.” (Roberts, 2012, p. 141).

He said, after the failure in the coup attempt that:

“For now, lamentably, the objectives we sought were not achieved. ... New situations will come and the country must definitively get on the path to a better destiny.” (Reuters, 2013).

Hence, considering his ideologically attributions to the historical national symbols, revolutionary stance against the system – especially when considering his leadership in a coup attempt – and adversarial stance against the political elite, as a military man, Chávez had revealed his interest in politics with a saliently populist-like manner. In 1994, he left prison thanks to the presidential pardon from Rafael Caldera on the

condition that he and his co-conspirators will not return to the army, and then travelled across the country in order to introduce his movement to the people (Roberts, 2012) by uttering his idea of Bolivarian social revolution. In 1997, Hugo Chávez and his fellows founded a political party called the ‘Fifth Republic Movement (MVR)’ as a formal political continuation of the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement 200, and started campaign for the presidential election in 1998.

During his election campaign, Chávez made promises based mostly on demagogic claims and pursued a strong populist language by, for instance, metaphorically offering to

“fry the heads of the corrupt traditional elites and get Venezuela out of the crisis situation through deep social and political change” (Maya, 2011, p. 219).

For that change, he promised to reconstruct the democratic system in Venezuela by announcing that:

“Clearly, today I am a warrior for peace, fighting for true democracy” (Schemo, 1998)

and declaring that:

“I swear in front of my people, that over this moribund constitution, I will push forward the democratic transformations that are necessary” (Reuters, 2013)

in his own words, and by pledging to

“hold a referendum with the aim of rewriting the 1961 Constitution, and threatened to jail anybody who opposed the Constitutional Assembly” (Schemo, 1998).

For his strategy, which majorly corresponds to the theoretical populist mindset, it can be said that it was involving creating an electoral majority to win the election by exploiting the existing crisis situation while pledging a ‘true democracy’ – which actually means direct democracy – and creating an antagonistic polarization against the political elites of the existing institutional political system, and, additionally, against all the actors serving for neoliberalism both from the inside and outside.

As an example of Chávez's populist method to carry out his strategy, it is worth mentioning his words of:

“The middle class today is becoming an exploited class. Here there are two poles: a minority of exploiters and a great majority of exploited. If that is class struggle, then there is an explosive element today in Venezuela” (Blanco Muñoz, 1998).

He also, in the same vein as his anti-neoliberal and anti-imperialist stance, declared that he will restrict the foreign investment in Venezuela's oil industry (Kovaleski, 1998). Relatedly, in addition, De la Torre (2017) describes Chávez's political stance as:

“He built on populist discourse and strategies to represent national and international politics as Manichaeian struggles between two antagonistic camps: neoliberalism vs. Socialism of the Twenty First Century (the idea articulated by Chávez in 2005); bourgeois-liberal democracy against participatory real democracy; and US led Pan-Americanism vs. Latin Americanism free from US imperialism” (p. 1272).

Ultimately, the Chávez era began in Venezuela in February 1999 after his triumph in the elections in December 1998 with 56.2 % of the votes. As he promised during his campaign, the Constitutional Assembly was convened and in December 1999, the new constitution of Venezuela, which was named as the “Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (CRBV)” was sanctioned by a referendum with 71.8 % of the votes. Besides of changing the name of the state with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, with the new constitution, human rights were extended, including granting the right to self-determination to the indigenous communities (Maya, 2011). Furthermore, within the scope of the constitutional text, there were

“environmental rights, the recognition of domestic work as an economic activity that created added value, and the right of housewives to social security” (Maya, 2011, p. 220).

In the following years, thanks to the upward trend in the international oil prices, policies and regulations for social development, such as the Robinson Missions which were for making the adult citizens complete the basic educational cycle; the Barrio

Adentro Mission for ensuring the right to health care for the poor by providing preventive medicine services; and the Mercal Mission for distribution and selling food in barrios at subsidized and more affordable prices, continued (Maya, 2011). It is possible to analyze this social and socio-economical developmental attitude of the Chávez administration as a typical populist manner to consolidate the already gained popular support. Nevertheless, such economical and social policies of populist governments are usually not financially sustainable in the long run. However, if the objective consolidation of power and steadiness can be ensured while it is still affordable to finance such policies, thereafter, populist governments can put the vision of social and economical development aside and change their directions towards a more ideologically radical path in order to preserve their popular support, as in the case of Venezuela.

Until 2005, Hugo Chávez had been describing his government's vision as the 'third way' which was neither capitalist nor socialist (Maya, 2011). However, after the great popular support in the 1999 referendum and his re-election with 59.8 % of the votes in 2000, he shifted to an ideology based discourse of 'twenty-first century socialism' in 2005. As Maya (2011) indicates, it was nothing more than

“a vague concept that conjured up values such as solidarity, fraternity, justice, liberty, and equality” (Maya, 2011, p. 226)

and that just aimed to mobilize the people. In this sense, one can say that the Chávez administration sets an example for Mudde and Kaltwasser's (2013) definition of populism as a thin-centred ideology. In Chávez's ideological path, which is specifically called 'Chavismo', there was a combination of a Bolivarian-style nationalism and updated socialism with a charismatic leader figure, but no certain and original comprehensive ideology.

The concept of Chavismo, as a movement, was being used by Chávez as an instrument to impose his way of thinking to the people particularly in a discursive way. For instance, in a speech, Chávez states that:

“Those who are not Chavistas are not Venezuelans” (Finchelstein, 2017, p. 202).

Although he, as a left-wing populist, had an inclusionary manner, especially without discrimination against the minority groups, towards to the people in the general sense, he was not hesitating to show his antagonistic face to the people who did not espouse his ideas. Moreover, as Finchelstein (2017) mentions, Chávez, in a sense,

“multiplied his name and projected it onto the nation and its people. Not only was he speaking in the name of the people, but his name was the name of the people: ‘Chávez is Venezuela’” (Finchelstein, 2017, p. 232).

In this sense, as a manifestation of another typical characteristic of the populist attitude, Chávez offered himself as the only true leader for his country and nation since he was the only real representative of the Venezuelan people. In one of his campaign speeches, he addressed to the people that:

“you are not going to reelect Chávez really, you are going to reelect yourselves, the people will reelect the people” (Hawkins, 2009, pp. 1040-1041).

Even, more exaggeratedly, and as an example of – as Finchelstein (2017) indicates – populists’ presentation of themselves as the messianic leaders of their nations, Chávez stated that:

“I come from many deaths. ... Even when I am gone I will remain with you on these streets and under this sky. ... Chávez is now an entire invincible people” (Finchelstein, 2017, p. 210).

Consequently, in time of crisis, by means of demagogically declaration of war against the political elites in the established democratic system of Venezuela, and against the United States-led imperialism and neoliberalism, challenging the status quo with a revolutionary vision, praising historical national heroes, and identification with the people in a transcendental manner, Hugo Chávez got the support of the majority. However, the question was that whether he would use that support for serving the people with a full commitment to democracy, or exploit it for hegemonic desires while moving democracy towards an authoritarian/totalitarian line.

3.2. The Chávez Administration between Democracy and Authoritarianism

Populism, as previously mentioned, is a result of the majoritarian characteristic of democracy. However, although it arises from democracy, the general concern over populism – most probably because of the hegemonic profiles most of the populist leaders – is about its potential, when the support of the majority is acquired, of ignoring democratic principles and turning the democratic regime into a repressive authoritarian regime for the purpose of assuring the presence of those in power. In the case of Venezuela under Hugo Chávez,

“Some authors argue that from the outset, Chávez had strong authoritarian proclivities and embarked down a path of gradual dismantling of democratic institutions and growing authoritarianism. In sharp contrast, many scholars toward the left of the political spectrum see contemporary Venezuela as a bastion of participatory democracy and social justice” (Mainwaring, 2012, p. 958).

During his electoral campaign before his accession to power, one of the major promises of Chávez was to form a true democratic system which means a more inclusionary, and thus more participatory, direct democracy so that, as Weyland (2013) remarks:

“Common citizens, so long neglected by traditional politicians, could at last have a direct say in their own governance” (pp. 21-22).

However, although that promise was actualized on paper in the process starting with the 1999 constitution, as Weyland (2013) points out, the directness of the new system was only limited to the local level decision making, without any influence at the national level policy making. Instead, it became apparent in time that Chávez’s main purpose by an unmediated system was to get rid of the established institutional barriers, such as separation of powers and checks and balances, to concentrate all the power in his own hands. Weyland summarizes the initial steps that were taken by the Chávez administration in line with this purpose as:

“First, he called a constituent assembly. Then, to dislodge the established political class that he charged with selfishness and corruption, he successfully pushed to close the recently elected bicameral Congress, where his followers held only about a third of the seats. Thanks to a reengineered electoral system, Chávez dominated the constituent assembly that boosted his powers, ended the ban on consecutive terms, and created a new unicameral (and hence easier to control) national legislature. ... Moreover, he took control of the courts and other independent institutions, such as Venezuela’s electoral commission, and soon had a stranglehold on all branches of government.” (Weyland, 2013, p. 21).

In addition to these, Chávez also appointed the judges who are loyal to him to the highest judicial authority, the Supreme Tribunal of Justice, and many lower court judges were fired and replaced by those who were the supporters of Chávez unconditionally (De la Torre, 2017). Hence, these developments clearly show that the democratic basis in Venezuela was highly distorted. Although the Chávez administration led to an increase in the level of public participation in politics via local organizations, such as the Bolivarian Circles, the Communal Councils (CCs) and citizen assemblies, and via referendums, those local organizations were being used to create a loyalty based hierarchical top to bottom relationship between the people and the leader, and to eliminate the functionality of elected local governments which did not belong to the president’s party.

The Bolivarian Circles were

“formed in low-income districts beginning in 2001 and ultimately collaborated with the government in a broad range of education, health care, nutrition, and other social programmes.” (Roberts, 2012, p. 151).

The Communal Councils, which were, in a sense, the successors of the Bolivarian Circles, possessed the authority to

“make planning decisions through local assemblies of citizens, form sub-committees to oversee the implementation of programmes in different areas, and obtain funding

directly from the central government for local infrastructure, housing, and development projects” (Roberts, 2012, p. 152).

Therefore,

“Given their dependence on state initiative and resources, CCs (and other community-based organizations) were often criticized by the opposition for being clientelistic and partisan instruments of Chavista control” (Roberts, 2012, p. 152).

That is to say that, despite the participation of a considerable number of people, as noted by Goldfrank (2011), local organizations, which were the most important components of the idea of participatory democracy, were the centers of political schism in which there was no pluralism since only the pro-Chávez people were welcome. On the other hand, the manner of frequently resorting to referendums was one of the main sources of overriding institutional checks and balances, and violating the principle of pluralism. In a similar plebiscitarian manner with the motivation of rapidly displacing the opposition, in addition, as De la Torre (2017) points out, there were 16 elections between 1999 and 2012, which turned the competitive elections into a kind of plebiscite in which the Venezuelan people were divided into two camps and asked whether they approve Chávez as the president, or not.

Therefore, one can say that Chávez’s concept of participatory democracy was neither truly participatory, nor democratic. It would not be incompatible to argue that the participatory aspect of Chavismo was similar to the efforts of former totalitarian regimes, such as the Nazi regime in Germany and the Communist regime in the USSR, to mobilize the people by making them participate in party organizations. In a similar vein with the indoctrinating environment of the totalitarian party organizations, it cannot be mentioned of a multilateral and democratic atmosphere in the local organizations in Venezuela. In this sense, Mainwaring (2012) argues that:

“To be a participatory democracy, a regime must first be a democracy. Enhanced opportunities for popular political participation might make a democracy more democratic, but they do not make an authoritarian regime a participatory democracy. Nor does the mere holding of competitive elections qualify a country as ‘democratic’,

even if its elites sometimes appeal to (what they call) ‘democracy’ and derive their power from election results and populist forms of mobilization” (p. 959).

So, the ever increasing support of the majority of the Venezuelan people made Chávez dare to enhance his domination over the country, and degenerate the liberal democratic regime into a repressive one. As some examples of this, Mainwaring (2012) refers that Corrales and Penfold (2011)

“document great centralization of power, attacks upon the opposition that go beyond the bounds of democratic politics, the banning and exiling of opposition politicians – for instance the exile of 2006 presidential candidate Manuel Rosales, and even beyond banning or exiling, the arrest of ex-governor from opposition Oswaldo Alvarez Paz (Levitsky and Loxton, 2013) –, an exceptional use of public-sector resources and jobs to favor political friends and punish opponents, widespread firing of public-sector employees who opposed Chávez, the emasculation of institutions of horizontal accountability, the curtailing of freedom of the press, and an increasingly uneven playing field” (Mainwaring, 2012, p. 958).

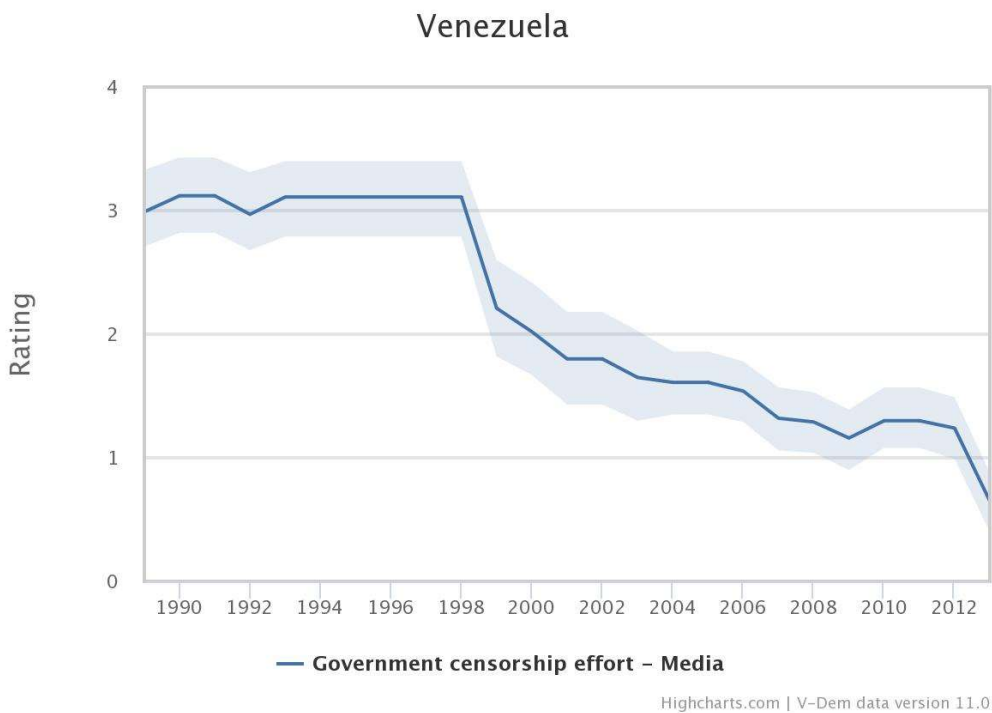


Figure 1. Government Censorship Effort in Venezuela (Source: V-Dem, 1989-2013)

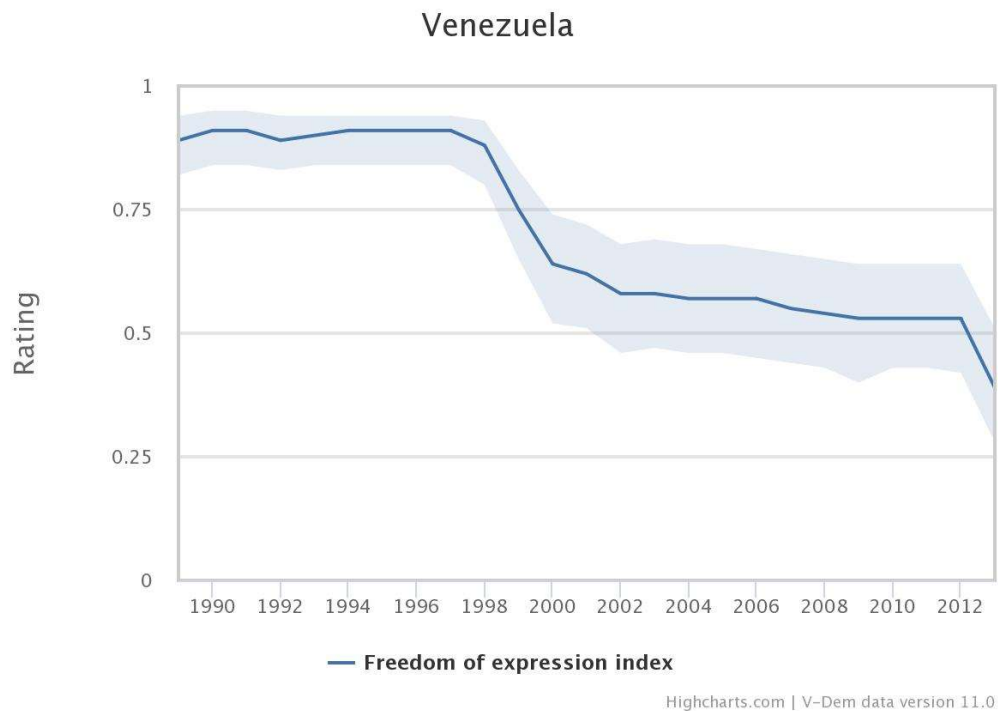


Figure 2. Freedom of Expression Index in Venezuela (Source: V-Dem, 1989-2013)

The Chávez regime had a considerable motivation to penetrate the media sector in order to increase its sphere of dominance over the country and the people. As Corrales and Penfold (2011) document and also shown in the Figure 1 and Figure 2, in comparison with the 10-year period before the beginning of the Chávez era, a dramatic decrease in the ratings of government censorship efforts and freedom of expression in Venezuela starts in 1999 with Chávez’s taking office. In this direction,

“The Organic Law of Telecommunications (2000) allows the government to suspend or revoke broadcasting concessions to private outlets if it is ‘convenient for the interests of the nation, or if public order and security demand it.’” (Corrales, 2015, p. 39).

Furthermore,

“The Law for Social Responsibility (2004) bans the broadcasting of material that could incite or promote hatred and violence. It was extended in 2010 to apply to the

Internet. Accordingly, electronic media may not transmit messages that ... 'refuse to recognize legitimately constituted authority'" (Corrales, 2015, p. 39).

While, by enacting such laws, the Chávez regime was aiming to silence oppositional voices in the media on the one hand, there was also a project of the regime, named 'the system of public media' (Maya, 2014), that, in a totalitarian way, was ideologically uniformizing the media, and using it as a channel to indoctrinate the people. In line with this purpose, Hugo Chávez started broadcasting a weekly program, called *Aló Presidente* (Hello President), on Venezuelan state television, so that he turned to a regular character in the daily lives of Venezuelans. Beside the regime's attempts in the media sector, education was also playing an important role in imposing the regime's ideology on the people – particularly on new generations –, as in the former totalitarian regimes. As De la Torre (2016) indicates, during the Chávez era, the educational system in Venezuela was overhauled

"to transmit Bolivarian ideology, and call for a 'comprehensive moral and spiritual revolution' to create 'a new man, a new society, a new ethics'" (De la Torre, 2016, p. 131).

In addition to all these, it can be said that the peak point of the efforts to concentrate all the power and transform the society into a homogenized body blended with the Bolivarian ideology was the proposed constitutional reform in 2007. The reform proposal was considered as dictatorial by a considerable part of the Venezuelan people including supporters of Chávez. As Fernandes (2007) points out, some pro-Chávez groups were concerned since there was a mixture of both progressive articles, such as the recognition of Afro-Venezuelan groups, in addition to indigenous groups included in the previous reforms, the obligation of gender equality in the public office positions, and a shortening of the work week to 36 hours; and retrogressive articles, such as increase in the presidential term from six to seven years and removal of the two-term limit, the suppression of the right to information during national emergencies, and the elimination of the autonomy of the central bank in the proposal (Fernandes, 2007). About the proposal, Rodriguez (2007) argues that it

“will significantly concentrate power in the hands of the national executive, it will reduce the public accountability of elected officials” (p. 14).

He also adds that:

“The president will also gain the power to significantly restrict individual and civil liberties and will have almost complete control over the military” (Rodriguez, 2007, p. 14).

Although, in the light of such concerns, the reform proposal was defeated in the referendum by approximately 51 percent to 49 percent of the votes, most of the proposed articles were enacted through presidential decrees and the endorsed constitutional referendum in 2009, in which the percentage of the votes in favor was 54.85. In the end, Hugo Chávez, who was elected as president after a democratic process and with the promise of transition to the real democracy in 1998, eroded democracy to create a hegemonic and – in order to preserve it – repressive regime which was partially authoritarian in terms of the presence of a very limited and unfair competition area, and partially totalitarian since there was an effort to compellingly unify the people around a set of ideas with an inclusionary manner by using democracy itself. Additionally, the repressive administrative line of the Chávez era which was in between authoritarianism and totalitarianism was maintained after his death.

During his illness, Chávez designated Nicolás Maduro as his successor, and after his death in 2013, Maduro became a candidate in the 2013 presidential election as the new leader of the PSUV. Due to the beginning of the decrease in popular support for Chávez and Maduro’s lack of leadership charisma, he won the election by getting only 1.5 % more of the total votes. Therefore, while Maduro was obviously following in Chávez’s wake in terms of his hegemonic populist manner, he needed to resort to harsher practices, such as – as Maya (2014) indicates – imprisoning the oppositional politicians, stripping the oppositional legislators of free speech, and actively charging the Bolivarian militiamen in ensuring public order.

CHAPTER 4: CASE ANALYSIS: HUNGARY UNDER VIKTOR ORBÁN'S FIDESZ

4.1. The Causes of the Emergence and Rise of Populism in Hungary

Before the detailed analysis about the position of the Fidesz government led by Viktor Orbán in Hungary between democracy and authoritarianism, firstly, in this section, the causes of the emergence and rise of populism in Hungary will be discussed in two parts by referring to the relatively recent historical background of the case. In the first part, there will be a general description about the efforts of democratization during the communist era, and about the state of politics in the period starting with the end of the communist era in Hungary. And in the second part, the political profiles of Viktor Orbán and the Fidesz, and their roles in the emergence of rise of populism in the country will be depicted.

4.1.1. Democratization (The post-communist era)

Today's Hungary is a parliamentary constitutional republic. As an ethnicity, the origins of the Hungarians date back to the 4th century. During the cold war period, Hungary (a.k.a. the Hungarian People's Republic), although it was not a soviet republic, was under the full control of the Soviet Union. The year 1956 partially became a milestone for the Hungarians on the road to democratization and liberation from the soviet repression. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 under the leadership of Imre Nagy was successful at the first stage, however, with a large scaled invasion, which resulted in Nagy's execution and lots of killings, the Soviet Union took control of the country again.

In 1989, towards the total collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc, the troubled economic and social conditions in Hungary drove some Hungarian reformists to lead the country into a democratic and capitalist line. Thus, for the purpose of transition to multiparty system, "The Hungarian Round Table Talks"

were formed with the participation of opposition groups including the Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz), the Alliance of Young Democrats (Fidesz), the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), the Hungarian People's Party (MNP), the Independent Smallholders' Party (FKgP), the Democratic Trade Union of Scientific Workers, and the Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Society. As a result of the talks, the transition to the multiparty democratic system has been completed. The first elections of the new system were held in 1990 which resulted in the victory of the Hungarian Democratic Forum and József Antall's taking office as the prime minister.

As many scholars underline, it was the adoption of the 1989 constitution that led Hungary into a democratic line with liberal and constitutional norms. In addition to the transition to multiparty system, the 1989 constitution also brought the mechanism of checks and balances to Hungary, and made the minority groups in politics considerable (Bánkuti, Halmai, and Scheppele, 2012). Additionally, they were the rule of law and the powers of the constitutional court that demonstrated how serious the new Hungarian Republic was about constitutional democratic order. About the Hungarian Constitutional Court of the 1990s, Steuer (2021) states that it

“came to be known as one of the most powerful institutions of its kind worldwide, thanks to its extensive review powers that it was willing to use to advance robust notions of international human rights compatible with (and sometimes going beyond) international standards.” (p. 7).

Although Hungary, in terms of democracy and individual rights and freedoms, was the prominent country among the post-soviet and post-communist countries, with the period starting in 2010, the Hungarian democracy has started to erode. After the first term starting in 1990 with the MDF government, there was a dominance of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) – except the term between 1998 and 2002 in which there was a coalition of Fidesz, FKgP and MDF – over the governments established in Hungary until the 2010 elections. However, under the shadow of the corruption scandals of the socialists, worsening economy and increasing social discontent, it was a milestone for the Hungarian politics when the then prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány

“admitted in a speech at a closed party conference in 2006 that the government had been lying to the electorate about the state of the economy in order to win the parliamentary elections” (Batory, 2016, p. 286).

After the speech – which is popularly known as the “Öszöd speech” – became public, nationwide protests against the government were held. Although Gyurcsány continued to remain in office for a while, at the end, he resigned in 2009 before his term in office expired. As emphasized above, such crisis situations in democratic countries usually pave the way for potential emergence of populist challenges. In the Hungarian case, it was Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz, with a different political stance from their first term in government, that took advantage of the then political and economic crisis situation.

4.1.2. Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz and the rise of populism in Hungary

Fidesz was initially formed as an oppositional movement against the communist government in 1988. The name of Fidesz was originally the abbreviation of the “Alliance of Young Democrats” – which was later on changed to the “Hungarian Civic Alliance”. Fidesz got entity as a political party in 1990 under the leadership of Viktor Orbán. Orbán himself and his party once had liberal characteristics and anti-clerical views (Halmai, 2019). However, as Batory (2016) and Müller (2011) remarks, the party could not achieve the expected point on such an ideological line, and therefore, they have changed their course towards a conservative, nationalist and religious ideological direction (Müller, 2011), so that Fidesz could be a catch-all party.

Nevertheless, the nationalist, conservative, and religious characteristics of the new Fidesz were not beyond being a means to get more votes. In this regard, for instance, Halmai (2019) analyzes the role of religion in Fidesz’s ideological position as not an important part of its identity, but as:

“a purely instrumental, opportunistic role in the party’s political strategy” (Halmai, 2019, p. 309).

Hence, rather than an ideological change, it would be more precise to interpret the shift in Fidesz's political posture as a mentality change that was a result of the party's political pragmatism. Not surprisingly, this political pragmatism reflects on Fidesz's and Orbán's courses of action and discourses through the frame of populism and demagogy. As an example of demagogy through nationalist feelings, as Müller (2011) and Bozóki (2011) indicate, in his public speaking, Viktor Orbán was frequently criticizing the Treaty of Trianon, which is a post-World War I treaty, and the country's huge territory losses imposed by the Allies in 1920 (Müller, 2011).

As a result, this populist pragmatic political strategy of Fidesz worked and brought the party to power in 1998 as the major partner of the coalition with FKgP and MDF. However, the aggressive and fiery populist manner of Fidesz and Orbán has essentially begun after the loss of elections in 2002. In the period between 2002 and 2010 under the Hungarian Socialist Party-led governments, the Fidesz's leader's actions and discourses hardened, especially with the outbreak of the corruption allegations about the socialists together with the economic disruption in the country. During that period, as a typical behavior of populists, the legitimacy of the government elites were brought into question by Viktor Orbán, and he, in a protesting manner, did not attend the parliament's sessions (Batory, 2016).

Additionally, Orbán had obviously started to create a cleavage within the society based on the perception of "us and them" through a nationalist rhetoric and by identifying himself with the people. With the period starting with the Öszöd speech, in addition to all the problematic economic and political conditions of the term, the polarizing manner of Fidesz led to the expansion of the party's grassroots against the Hungarian Socialist Party. As a result, in such a political conjuncture, Fidesz became the first party with an absolute majority of the seats in the parliament in the 2010 general elections. Moreover, with an alliance with the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP), they achieved a two-thirds majority of the seats which is required to amend or remake the constitution.

This victory was demagogically introduced as a 'revolution through the ballot box' (Bogaards, 2018) against the corrupt elites by Viktor Orbán and his party. After the

landslide victory in 2010, Orbán continued to maintain his populist stance in order to keep and consolidate his position in power. In line with this purpose, he brought forward the idea of the “system of national cooperation”. It was simply an idea in accordance with the purpose of unifying the people on the basis of national values against the alleged enemies from inside and outside of Hungary. Orbán frequently targets the European Union as the foreign enemy, and the alleged domestic co-conspirators of the foreign enemies as the domestic enemies of the Hungarian nation in his speeches. As an example, by aiming at the European Union, he said that:

“we did not tolerate Vienna dictating to us in [18]48, and we did not tolerate in [19]56 and 1990 that Moscow dictates to us. We won’t allow it now either that anyone from Brussels or anyone else dictates to us.” (Batory, 2016, p. 290).

In his another speech, Orbán said, by alluding to enemies both inside and outside of the country, that:

“We are building a country where the people do not work for the profit of foreigners. A country where it is not bankers and foreign bureaucrats who tell us how to live, what kind of a constitution to have, when we can raise wages or pensions. A country where no one can force others’ interests onto the Hungarian people. ... [but] Those abroad and at home who for many years or even decade exploited Hungary’s weakness politically and economically are not happy. They are getting ready to take Hungary back to the past. ... [But] We won’t forget that they ruined the country together.” (Batory, 2016, p. 290).

The idea of national cooperation was, in a sense, like a litmus paper used to determine the members of “us” and “them”. Those who adopted that idea – and, of course, who were the supporters of Fidesz at the same time – belonged to the so-called real people, while those who were not the supporters of Fidesz and rejected the idea of national cooperation were the others. With the outbreak of the refugee crisis in Europe, such a discriminatory attitude of the government was also displayed against the refugees in order to exploit the geographic crisis situation in its favor at home by fostering xenophobia. Nevertheless, it was based on a conjunctural issue. However, the only fact

and group that, essentially, were fixedly and ideologically aimed at from the beginning of the system of national cooperation were liberalism and the liberal elites, as ironically opposed to the former liberal profile of Orbán and Fidesz.

About his new illiberal vision, Viktor Orbán said that:

“We have to abandon liberal methods and principles of organizing a society. The new state that we are building is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state.” (Buzogány, 2017, p. 1308).

This new illiberal stance of Orbán can be understood from two different perspectives. First, it is possible to interpret the notion of illiberalism as a mobilizing word meaning the rejection of the last two decades after the communist era (Magyar, 2016) when the so-called corrupt liberal elites were in a dominant position in the Hungarian politics. Secondly, it can be interpreted that defending illiberalism is a kind of fight against the institutional structure of the state, which brings the system of checks and balances, on the way to concentration of power, which was already an overt component in Fidesz’s political goals termed as the ‘central field of power’ (Buzogány, 2017). Such a mindset undoubtedly means to use the powers acquired democratically in order to achieve undemocratic gains.

4.2. Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz between Democracy and Authoritarianism

As previously indicated, populism, as a concept, displays an inclination to betray its reason for being, democracy, at the first opportunity. And in a more or less democratic country, for a populist actor or party, such an opportunity can only arise in case of achieving the support of the majority of the people. In this sense, the 2010 general election was a milestone for the Hungarian politics, because a populist party, Fidesz, and its alliance partner, KDNP, won the elections by getting the majority of the seats in the parliament and receiving more than 50% of the votes. While Fidesz, by itself, had the absolute majority in the parliament, together with its partner, they were composing the two-thirds majority.

As conceptually underlined in the literature, when they achieve enough support, populists aim to change the rules of the game in their favor in order to maintain their rule. Such an incentive unavoidably causes a democratic erosion with authoritarian practices. In the case of Hungary, in this regard, the Viktor Orbán-led Fidesz government acted quickly to take measures for the purposes of consolidating and perpetuating their position in power. One can say, as Rogers (2020) argues, that that motivation of Fidesz particularly resulted from the quick ending of its first experience in power between 1998 and 2002. As the first and foremost, it was the adoption of the new constitution, the Fundamental Law of Hungary, in 2011 that was the reason of hauling of the country towards a repressive and arbitrary style of governing.

Since, differently from outright authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, populist regimes, eventually, still need democracy, even if as just on paper, to legitimize their actions, it is the best option to change the rules of the game in their favor by the way of making new constitutions and legal regulations. Thanks to its two-thirds majority in the parliament, the Orbán-led government did not feel the need to confer on the content of the new constitution with other political parties during the making process. Moreover, although it was a populist government, the new constitution was adopted without a referendum. That is exactly why the new constitution is perceived as a ‘constitutional coup d’etat’ by Magyar (2016) and the opponents of the government. It is also ironic, as underlined by Bugaric, (2015) that:

“because the new Hungarian Constitution properly guarantees “neither fundamental rights nor checks and balances,” which is the core function of modern constitutions, it is also “unconstitutional.” (p. 225).

Beyond damaging the democratic and constitutional reputation of Hungary, through the new constitution and, subsequently, the additional amendments and legal regulations, the government daringly took steps in the direction of creating an authoritarian domination on many segments in the country from business life to social life. For instance, the Labor Code was regulated in an obstructing manner that made difficult for workers to express dissatisfaction organizedly, and union rights were limited, thus, the right of workers to strike was curtailed (Bozóki, 2011). Furthermore,

“The private pension insurance system was nationalized in such a way that people were left with no other rational choice but to move back into the state supported pension system. Thus, in Hungary the basic principles of constitutional law, such as respect for private property, the freedom of contract and legal certainty came into question.” (Bozóki, 2011, p. 655).

As a result of another amendment in 2013, that is highlighted by Bugaric (2015), the Hungarian universities were extensively brought under governmental control by undermining their autonomous structure, and being homeless became forbidden by, in fact, tacitly implying refugees and the Roma people, as a reflection of Fidesz’s exclusionary populism. On the other hand, that amendment also paved the way for potential political prosecutions as obviously a threat of the government to its political rivals. Besides, as one of the attempts of the government to centralize power, the new constitution led to the undermining of local governments’ autonomy in many aspects, such as restricting their resources, taking most of their functions under the authority of the central government, (Bozóki, 2011) and abolishing their property right (Magyar, 2016).

Furthermore, as Bozóki (2011) indicates, as a result of the modification of the house rules in addition to the two-thirds majority of the Fidesz-KDNP alliance in the parliament, the Hungarian parliament turned into a legislative organ of the government. Laws were passing without parliamentary debates, since they were seen unnecessary by Viktor Orbán. Yet, the only necessary thing in law-making and decision-making processes for a populist regime is the so-called public will, which is unknown to anyone but the ruling authority, and determined by it. As underlined in the theoretical framework chapter, populists’ – who have the support of the majority – frequent attribution to the public will under the name of direct democracy results from their desire to rule in a plebiscitarian way, or, in other words, to create a tyranny of the majority. While, in most of the countries under populist governments, such a plebiscitarian way of ruling is framed based on referendums, in Hungary, it was provided, as conceptualized by Batory and Svensson (2019) as ‘the abuse of participatory governance’, via questionnaires, named the national consultations, sent to

citizens which were full of multiple choice questions that direct the participants to specific answers.

For instance, in the National Consultation about Immigration and Terrorism, a question asked:

“Do you agree with the government that instead of allocating funds to immigration we should support Hungarian families and those children yet to be born?” (Batory and Svensson, 2019, p. 8).

As another example, in a consultation on the economy, a question asked:

“There are those who think that the state has to restrain big companies which are in a monopoly situation. Others think that there is no need for this; it is ok that the big fish eats the small fish. What do you think?” (Batory and Svensson, 2019, p. 8).

Considering such a manner in the questionnaires, one can say that it is obvious that instead of being a promotion of participatory or direct democracy, the Fidesz government’s national consultations are nothing more than the government’s effort to legitimize their actions by basing on the public will.

Apart from these, the other attempts of the government to create hegemony under the guise of democracy and legality continued with suppressing and controlling the media sector and the judicial authority, and with occupying the critical positions in the state institutions through appointments of the loyalists. With the new reforms in the field of the media, that unequivocally is one of the checking elements in democratic systems, the government established the Media Council which was a regulatory body entrusted with the authorities of issuing

“financial penalties at its discretion not only to radio or television programs that fail to abide by the media laws, but also to print or electronic media, and even to bloggers. The sum of the penalties can be so high as to be capable of silencing media outlets completely”. (Bozóki, 2011, p. 653).

At this point, it is critical to underline that the members of such an influential body was being elected by the two-thirds majority in the parliament, and the head of the body was being directly appointed by the prime minister. That means that although the Media Council was a state organ on the surface, it was actually a party organ of Fidesz. Not surprisingly, as a result of this, the Media Council punished several oppositional media outlets. In addition to the activities of the Media Council,

“Fidesz loyalists directly or indirectly acquired the ownership of important media outlets, and government appointees dominated the management of public service broadcasters, leaving little space for unbiased political discourse” (Batory, 2016, p. 295).

Thus, most of the Hungarian media outlets turned into pro-government organs in which there was no or very little chance for the oppositional parties to express themselves.

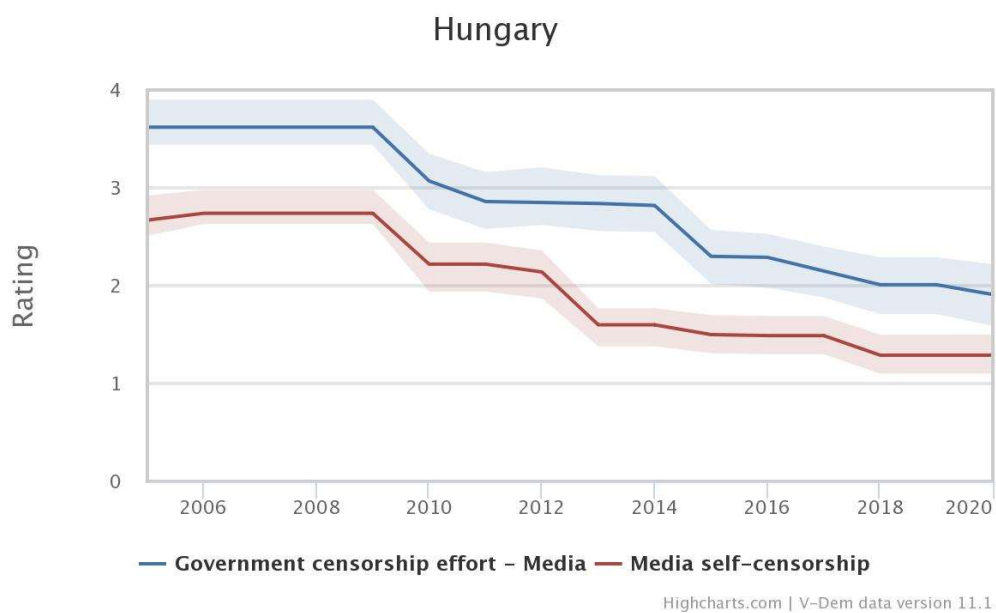


Figure 3. Government Censorship Effort and Self-censorship in the Hungarian Media (Source: V-Dem, 2005-2020)

Furthermore, with the domination of Fidesz in public media organizations, many employees working in those organizations were fired just because they were not sympathizers of Fidesz (Bánkuti, Halmai, and Scheppelle, 2012). Such developments in the Hungarian media sector also led to a self-censorship mostly because of fear of job loss. With respect to these, Figure 3 shows the negative changes in the scores (4: best, 0: worst) of government censorship effort and self-censorship in the media with the Fidesz's accession to power in 2010.

As in the Media Council, the Orbán administration, the cabinet and the representatives in the parliament hand in hand, appointed or elected the Fidesz loyalists to the critical positions in the state institutions and organizations while, on the other hand, there was a cleansing aimed at the merited staff. First and foremost, for instance,

“The government majority, upon Orbán’s recommendation, chose not to reappoint László Sólyom as President of the Republic, an individual who while previously making significant pro-Fidesz moves, nevertheless guarded the autonomy of the presidency. The servile Pál Schmitt, a formal presidential member of Fidesz and European Parliament representative, was appointed instead” (Bozóki, 2011, p. 651).

Besides, for the position of attorney general, the government appointed a previous political candidate of Fidesz (Bozóki, 2011), and also,

“A Fidesz politician who simultaneously serves as the President of the Parliamentary Cultural Committee became the President of the National Cultural Fund and for this reason, this person oversees his own job” (Bozóki, 2011, p. 652).

All of these and more mean that in the new political order under Viktor Orbán’s leadership, there was no room for meritocracy, at least when it comes to the important positions, and that the appointments and elections to the positions in the state institutions were used as rewards for the loyalists. This is why Magyar (2016) analyzes the administrative structure of the Fidesz government through the concept of “mafia state” that

“refers to the nature of organization and the order of the new ruling elite” (p. 69)

based on a likening to the family-like, but at the same time, interest-based order in mafia organizations in which there is a certain leader at the top.

The National Electoral Commission was another critical body which filled by the Fidesz loyalists. Together with that, thanks to the two-thirds parliamentary majority of the government, the electoral law was changed in order to gerrymander the voting districts. As a result of this, in the following general election in 2014, the alliance of Fidesz and KDNP

“won with 45% of the popular vote, the changes in the electoral law resulted in six additional seats for the government despite having lost more than 560.000 voters” (Buzogány, 2017, p. 1312)

and 7 percentage points in comparison with the 2010 general elections. With regard to this,

“The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) criticized the elections as “free but not fair” (Buzogány, 2017, pp. 1312-1313).

Another focal point of Fidesz concerning its power centralization strategy was the judicial branch of the state. With the Fundamental Law and the other legal regulations, the powers of the Constitutional Court were curtailed. As a significant example, thanks to the Fundamental Law, the Constitutional Court turned into just a reviewing body. Hence, even if a law is qualified as anti-constitutional by the Court, it can still be added to the constitution (Magyar, 2016). Even, moreover, the extent of the reviewing activity of the Constitutional Court was highly limited. Before the Fundamental Law entered into force, in 2010,

“Parliament passed an amendment to limit judicial review of budget and tax measures after the Constitutional Court found that a 98 percent retroactive tax on state employee compensation was unconstitutional. After the amendment, the Court could only review budgets, implementation of budgets, tax laws, and laws regulating local government taxation if those laws violated certain listed rights” (Bánkuti, Halmai and Scheppele, 2012, pp. 254-255),

such as the right to life, and freedom of conscience and religion. As another result of the Fundamental Law, citizens’ opportunity to directly petition the court was abolished (Batory, 2016). Furthermore, in order to occupy the higher judicial bodies, the retirement age for judges was lowered from 70 to 62, so that most of the court presidents could be replaced with the new and loyal ones (Bugaric, 2015).

In addition, for the Constitutional Court,

“The appointment procedure was changed significantly in 2011 from a model supporting the influence of all parliamentary parties on the composition of the Court (even in case of a constitutional majority held by a single party) to one that significantly favours the influence of the parliamentary majority” (Steuer, 2021, p. 7).

The procedure for the determination of the Constitutional Court’s chairperson was also changed. While, previously, he or she had been chosen

“by the members from within their own rank ..., according to the new rules, it was parliament that was to appoint him or her” (Bozóki, 2011, p. 652).

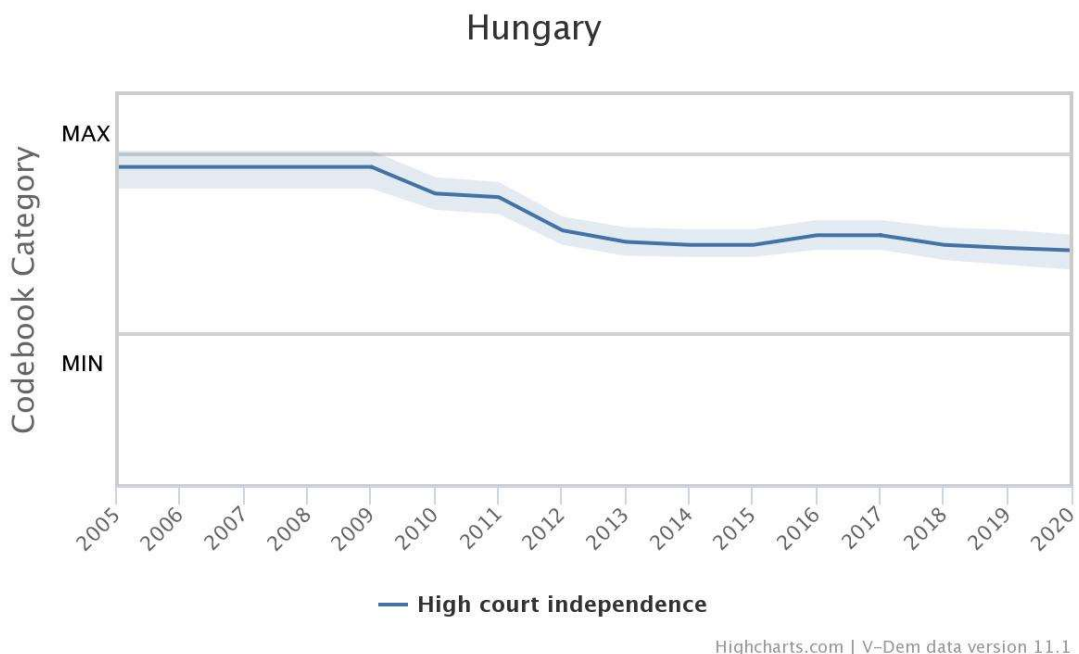


Figure 4. High Court Independence in Hungary (Source: V-Dem, 2005-2020)

Besides all these, one of the most corruptive steps taken in the field of judiciary by the government was a constitutional addendum package called ‘The Act on the Transitory Provisions to the Fundamental Law’. With that package, the head of the National Judicial Office and the public prosecutor, who are elected by a two-thirds majority in the parliament, became authorized to

“assign specific cases to specific courts according to their assessment of the relative workloads of these courts” (Bánkuti, Halmai and Scheppele, 2012, p. 263).

Hence, for the government, the way was paved for using the judiciary as a mechanism in order to punish those they want to punish and acquit those they want to acquit by assigning their cases to the loyal judges via the head of the National Judicial Office and the public prosecutor they elected. All these such developments necessarily made the independence of the judiciary in Hungary open to question. In this regard, it is shown in Figure 4 that the level of independence of the high court in Hungary started to decline with the process starting with Fidesz’s accession to power.

In consequence, after coming to power thanks to the existence of democracy in 2010, the Fidesz government led by Viktor Orbán sought the ways to assure their presence in power while they already had the support of the majority of the people. In this respect, they declared war against the liberal and constitutional principles of democracy, which are the prerequisites for a complete democracy. In typical hegemonic populist manners, the Orbán administration concentrated almost all the critical powers through clientelistic and invasive practices, and by turning ‘the rule of law’ into the ‘law of rule’ or ‘rule by law’ (Ágh, 2016). Although Viktor Orbán claims that they constituted an illiberal democracy, what actually happened was that he and his fellows changed the constitutional democratic order of Hungary to an authoritarian one-party regime.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Democracy has a two-faced characteristic. While it gives the people sovereignty, it may also be an instrument to take sovereignty back from the people. In the democratic societies which do not have a deep-seated insight of democracy and freedom, the political actors with hegemonic aspirations can make use of the majoritarian feature of democracy in their favor by exploiting the materialistic expectations, and nationalist and religious emotions of the people in a demagogic way for the purpose of realizing their hegemonic desires. In today's world, such a scenario is conceptualized in one word: populism.

It is obvious that, in the system of democracy, what is firstly needed for populist demagogues in order to be able to achieve their hegemonic goals is the support of the people. In consideration of this, the populists who are in power with enough support – in terms of the type of the government system in their countries – are the focus of this thesis. It was aimed to clarify the tendency of preference of the populists in power with enough support of the people between the options of standing within the democratic boundaries and authoritarianization by the way of eroding the existing democratic order.

In this respect, the main argument of this thesis is that when populists come to power with enough support of the people, they embark on a quest to consolidate and perpetuate their presence in power by striving to concentrate and make use of all the powers that had been distributed to different organs of the state on behalf of the checks and balances, and hence, by eroding democracy and turning it to a hegemonic authoritarian system. This argument was firstly discussed within the frame of a theoretical perspective. Afterwards, the outcomes of the theoretical discussion were examined through the cases of Venezuela during the administration of Hugo Chávez, and Hungary under the Fidesz government.

As a result of the theoretical discussion, it was found out that although, in most of the academic debates, it is presented as a reason for democratic backsliding and, even, annihilation of democratic order, populism, as a concept, does not pose a threat to democracy by itself. While populism by itself, without external factors, can be

approached just as one of the styles of democracy consideration in which the people has an active and direct role in decision making processes, what actually makes populism, that arose from democracy, a corrosive, and even, a destructive element for democracy is its exploitation by potential hegemons by means of demagogically mobilization of the people in order to create an absolute domination over the political, economic and social spheres in their countries, which ends in a change in the democratic order in the direction of an authoritarian system. On the way of domination, the established arrangements of democracy, including the constitutional and liberal principles that come from and are checked by the bodies of the democratic institutions of jurisdiction and legislation, are perceived as the obstacles to be overcome by populist hegemons.

This is why the adjective of “anti” is used in defining the characteristics of populists too often. It is obvious that the populists in search of domination are not on the side of political liberalism, the principle of pluralism, and democratic institutionalism which require them to be tied to consociationalism and a continuous supervision by the democratic institutions which hamper potential hegemons to act arbitrarily on the way of creating their sovereignty. However, because of their need, even if symbolically, for the presence of democracy as a means of legitimization – differently from the outright authoritarian and totalitarian regimes – since the society has the experience of the democratic life, populist hegemons are in search of changing the established status-quo in their favor and monopolize the power via constitutional and legal based reforms while keeping the existences of the democratic institutions, but, at the same time, seizing their full control.

In this sense, hegemonic populists usually, especially while they are in struggle for power, make propaganda against the existing liberal democratic order in their countries by emphasizing the weaknesses of and reflecting the general discontent about it. Instead of liberal democracy, they promote an illiberal, deinstitutionalized, and more direct form of democracy without any supervisor, so that they are able to create a hierarchy in which they are at the top and a dominating position above the people without any mediator. However, with the lack of institutional checks, and, in addition, the lack of liberal

democratic principles and individual rights and freedoms, it cannot be made mention of a complete democracy.

Such a consideration of democracy, in fact, means evaluating democracy as consisting only of elections. Yet, that kind of political order would be what Schmitter and Karl (1991) call electoralism rather than democracy. In a similar vein with the concept of electoralism, Levitsky and Loxton (2013), by implying populist regimes in particular, come up with the concept of competitive authoritarianism which suggests a system in which most of the rights and freedoms are restricted, but there are regular elections with just a limited area for democratic competition.

In the light of the context of such theoretical discussions in this thesis, the analysis of the selected cases proves that, regardless of the difference in their ideological bases, populists in power with enough support of the people tend to act in the same direction with what is depicted theoretically. At this point, one can say, based on the cases of Venezuela and Hungary, that one of the nuances between the ideologically different cases becomes apparent when it comes to mobilizing the people. In this sense, while Chávez, as a left-wing populist, on the one hand, was displaying a relatively more inclusionary populist manner through an effort to unify the people against the so-called common enemies, such as the United States; the Fidesz of Orbán, as a right-wing populist party, on the other hand, has a more exclusionary populist attitude particularly against ethnic minorities and refugees for the purpose of directing the people to new specific targets in addition to the European Union.

The other nuance between the two cases is about the type of the system of government. On the one hand, there is a presidential system in Venezuela; and on the other hand, Hungary has a parliamentary system. Nonetheless, it can be said that the difference between the government systems of the two countries does not constitute a considerable difference between the philosophies of ruling of the Chávez administration and the Fidesz government, since the Fidesz government has a super majority in the Hungarian parliament. Especially when considering a leader with hegemonic desires at the top, that majority paves the way for concentrating all the power in the hands of the head of the executive branch of the state. Thus, one can say that, in practice, there is

almost no difference between the president of Venezuela and the prime minister of Hungary in terms of the authority they hold.

In conclusion, as a result of the analysis of the selected cases based upon the research question and the main argument of this thesis, it is deduced that when populism in the hands of hegemonic demagogues in power comes together with enough support of the people, it turns its back on the democratic principles. From then on, democracy turns into a means to legitimize undemocratic actions, and constitutions turns into instruments to legalize unconstitutional practices of the ruling elite. Therefore, in the end, arbitrary and repressive implementations and, hence, authoritarianization become inevitable. Nevertheless, in terms of the degree of the involvement and influence of democracy in it, the populist-style authoritarianism creates an idiosyncratic impression of authoritarianism, which can be called a 'new face of authoritarianism'.

Finally, although there was no considerable limitation faced in this thesis, the lack of certain definitions of the concepts of populism, democracy and authoritarianism mostly because of their abstract and immeasurable features was the prominent obstacle to be overcome. In this respect, one of the aims of this thesis is to theoretically clarify these concepts in order to light the way for future studies. Although, in this thesis, two typical and contemporary cases were selected to analyze, considering the fact that populism is in an increasing trend in today's world, it is possible to foresee that more updated cases of populism with new specific characteristics can arise and enable the researchers in this field to develop and diversify the vision of this thesis.

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