Introduction
Recognition of the People

This book is about how democracy should – and, just as importantly, should not – recognize the people. The debate over the meaning and value of populism is essentially a debate over this question. Around the world, voters turn to populism because of the way in which it promises to respect the people.[1] Supporters of populism feel resentment at the alleged disrespect displayed by the political and cultural "elite." They claim that their society does not properly recognize their standing as "the people." Populism provides the recognition that many people feel they have lost or never attained. In short, populism is about recognition of the people.

Since democracy is supposed to be a form of society in which citizens mutually respect one another as equal participants, we should not be surprised – nor necessarily regret – that people feel resentment when society shows contempt or disregard for their identity, way of life, and political opinions. Still, in the face of the rise of populism, we must acknowledge that not all struggles for recognition promote what I call democratic respect.

While struggles for recognition have been central to the progress of modern democracy, to broader inclusion and more equality, current conflicts over recognition and respect often threaten rather than deepen or widen democracy. Populism, with its demand for the recognition of the people, often seems to come into conflict with democratic norms. Why is that so? To answer this question, *Democratic Respect* analyzes the meaning and validity of different kinds of demand for recognition, as well as their connection to democratic ideals. "Recognition of the people" can mean many different things, and these different meanings connect to different interpretations of democracy. Thus, the debate over the meaning and value of populism is a debate both over how best to understand democracy and over what kind of recognition democratic citizens owe one another.

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[1] As we proceed, I will distinguish more clearly between recognition and respect, as well as other related terms.

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Political scientists and sociologists typically understand the resentment of supporters of populism as purely emotional and unconnected to facts and principles. This book argues instead that we should approach populist resentment as part of a struggle for recognition based on distinctively moral experiences that depend on factual beliefs and normative judgments. When people feel disrespected, it is because they believe certain principles regarding how they ought to be treated have been violated. Thus, their feelings are what I call principle-dependent and can be objects of moral evaluation. This approach entails that we take people's resentments seriously as demands for recognition that we should assess on their merits. Are they demands that we should heed in a democracy understood as a society of free and equal participants? Not all demands for recognition raised in contemporary politics are rooted in democratic norms, and this book examines their important moral and democratic differences. In particular, it promotes a notion of democratic respect that helps us to answer questions concerning what citizens owe to each other and what constitutes unreasonable demands for recognition in a democracy.

People can achieve recognition in different settings, but today the struggle for respect and esteem seems to have turned to politics as its primary arena in many countries around the world. Complex social, cultural, and economic developments connected to globalization, migration, the dismantling of manufacturing, growing automation, financial capitalism, increased economic inequality, the weakening of political parties, and changes in cultural values have changed people's roles, obligations, and rights, as well as the distribution of material resources and access to political influence.[2] As a result, many people have lost their formerly secure feelings of identity and status, and they are increasingly turning their frustration at their loss toward the political system by supporting populist parties and leaders. This reaction might seem irrational, and to be a craving for mere symbolic self-affirmation where in fact something more substantial and complex is at stake. However, in the struggle for recognition, material, social, and cultural needs and demands are always intertwined.[3] The problem, this book argues, is not that people engage in struggles for recognition, or that they turn this struggle toward the

[2] There is an abundance of sources documenting and discussing these developments in relation to the rise of populism. See, for example, Berman, "Populism Is a Symptom"; Brubaker, "Why Populism," 369 ff.; Cohen, "Populism"; Cramer, *Politics of Resentment*; Gest, Reny, and Mayer, "Roots of the Radical Right"; Gidron and Hall, "Populism as a Problem"; Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*; Inglehart and Norris, "Trump"; Mair, "Populist Democracy vs Party Democracy."

[3] Cohen, "Populism"; Gidron and Hall, "Populism as a Problem"; Zurn, "Populism, Polarization, and Misrecognition."

political arena. This may in fact be a very democratic way of dealing with these issues. It becomes a problem only when the struggle for recognition takes undemocratic forms. But when is that the case? The question for normative democratic theory is *what kind* of recognition and respect people can demand in political interaction with their fellow citizens and from the government.

As should already be clear, I do not regard struggles for recognition as limited to questions of identity and culture. Thus, in the notion of "struggle for recognition" I include both struggles for the recognition of particular identities and the more universalist politics of respect for dignity. Indeed, the difference between these kinds of recognition will be central to my argument. Moreover, the book's focus on populism as a form of struggle for recognition is not an indication that populism is caused by cultural as opposed to economic factors. Finally, my argument does not assume that recognition is always a good thing, or that all deficits of recognition are bad or wrong.[4] Nor do I assume that struggles for recognition are necessarily struggles for equality. Indeed, my analysis of populist struggles for recognition shows that the latter can protect existing status hierarchies or create new ones.

The question of what kind of recognition populism supplies to the people connects to the question of how populists understand democracy. And the question of which demands for recognition are *democratically* legitimate depends on what we think is the normatively best way to understand democracy. Thus, we need to discuss and assess the populist understanding of democracy and its alternatives. This book regards populism as advocating a distinct conception of democracy, and it assumes that part of the appeal of this conception of democracy lies in how it claims to recognize the people. In addition, I accept the common idea that the norm of equal respect is central to the meaning and justification of democracy. However, while I take it that most of us can agree that recognition is central to democracy – not only to its meaning and justification, but also to its practice and development – we often use this notion in confusing and unclear ways. Thus, the book analyzes and discusses a variety of demands for recognition and distinguishes between associated concepts such as esteem, respect, honor, status, and solidarity.

What is theoretically and philosophically interesting about populism is that in many ways it looks essentially democratic, and that it claims to be committed to core democratic principles such as majority rule and

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[4] For an argument why it is not always good to be recognized and why struggles for recognition can lead to oppression, see Markell, *Bound by Recognition*. For criticism of what he calls "the recognition deficit model," see McBride, *Recognition*, 6–7, 115–19.

popular sovereignty. The populist conception of democracy is actually close to the understanding of democracy that we find not only among many ordinary people, but also among many political scientists.[5] Moreover, the populist demand for recognition of the people sounds like an essentially democratic demand. Therefore, I think that the rise of populism challenges every democratically minded person to reflect on exactly how we understand our democratic ideals, institutions, and practices. Is not democracy defined by majority rule and responsiveness to the people's preferences? Does this not mean that democracy should recognize the people? And does it not imply that populism has the true and best understanding of democracy? The answers to these questions are by no means easy or straightforward.

This book argues that while equal respect is central to democracy, not all nominal demands for recognition and respect are compatible with democratic equality. Populist politicians, for example, make both valid and invalid demands for recognition and respect on behalf of their supporters, and it is important for our understanding and practice of democracy that we become better at distinguishing between these demands. In particular, the type of respect that democracy requires should not be confused with esteem for one's merits or identity, but must consist in respect for one's status. Moreover, when the demand is for respect for one's status, the democratic requirement is that this claim should be for one's status as a *free and equal participant* in society ("democratic respect"), not as a superior (aristocratic "honor respect").

It is a core idea of the book that democratic respect requires that citizens, as a rule, relate to one another through what I call a "participant attitude," rather than an observer attitude. Participants view one another as free and mutually accountable parts of a shared community, while observers see others as "cases" to be explained and manipulated to achieve desirable consequences. In a democracy, we should consider each other not as cases in need of treatment, but as free, equal, and responsible persons who make mutual claims, which we should consider on their merits rather than as expressions of alien causes. *Democratic Respect* promotes the participant attitude both as an approach in political theory and as central to a democratic ethos among citizens. The book's approach to resentment draws on Peter Strawson's notion of the participant attitude, while the discussion of democratic respect is inspired by Kant's practical philosophy as well as contemporary theories of recognition, respect, and democracy.

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[5] Sabl, "Two Cultures of Democratic Theory."

This book is written by a political theorist, and political theorists tend to think ideas matter. That is why we write about them and try to counter bad ideas with what we take to be better ideas. As Isaiah Berlin said in his inaugural professorial address at the University of Oxford, it is crucial that "those who have been trained to think critically about ideas" attend to them, because otherwise ideas may "acquire an unchecked momentum and irresistible power over multitudes of men that may grow too violent to be affected by rational criticism."[6] Indeed, this book is motivated by the fear that populism as a set of ideas will acquire unchecked momentum and attain power over millions of people around the world, as well as by the conviction that those of us who are trained to think critically about ideas have an obligation to understand the ideas behind the populist momentum and counter them to the extent we find this justified.

Political ideas shape political culture, and democracy depends on the shape of society's political culture. Ideas about what democracy is and requires of citizens have the power to change the political culture and thereby to transform or even undermine democracy.[7] There are good reasons to think that populism is changing the political culture in many countries around the world in a way that is transforming how we understand and engage in democracy.[8] It is incumbent on everyone, and especially those trained to analyze and assess ideas, to reflect on and discuss the populist ideas that are changing how we understand and hence practice democracy. The point of the kind of normative political theory represented in this book is not to tell people what to do, but to contribute to the common reflection on democratic ideals and how we institutionalize and practice them. In particular, the aim of this book is to consider how best to understand and practice the fundamental attitude of what I call democratic respect.

It is crucial that political theory and philosophy show modesty in an investigation such as this. We should not expect to be able to provide principles, much less some kind of algorithm, from which we can immediately derive determinate answers to actual cases. Kantian theory is sometimes caricatured as if this were its aim, but this is a misunderstanding.[9]

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[6] Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 119.

[7] I owe the notion that populism transforms democracy to Urbinati, *Me the People*. On the importance of informal norms for the survival of democracy, see Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 91–117.

[8] Rosanvallon (*Le siècle du populisme*, 78) suggests that beyond strictly populist parties, a "populist atmosphere" that relies on populist ideas and strategies is spreading in many places.

[9] For a rejection of the idea that Kantians aim to provide principles that work like algorithms, see O'Neill, "Abstraction, Idealization and Ideology." See also Rawls (*Theory of Justice*, 319–20) on what we can and cannot expect a theory of justice to provide regarding actual cases.

For Kantians, to treat philosophy as an authority that thinks for others violates the fundamental meaning of enlightenment and would be a form of disrespect for people's capacities to think and decide for themselves. Moreover, for Kant and many neo-Kantians, enlightenment and learning depend on what Kant called "the public use of reason" and what contemporary political theorists refer to as public deliberation.[10] Thus, the purpose of my analysis and discussion is not to substitute for the public deliberation of citizens, but rather to contribute to it. I hope to offer some concepts and distinctions that will help us to see more clearly what the relevant considerations are, and to what we should pay special attention in contemporary cases of demands for recognition of the people. The notion of democratic respect that this book develops should therefore not be understood as a formula that can or should be applied in a dogmatic fashion; it should rather be seen as a basic attitude through which democratic citizens should perceive one another.[11]

In this book, I argue that the notion of democratic respect can show populism and its demand for recognition to be less democratic than they appear. For those who might insist that populism simply has a different conception of democracy, I hope the following chapters will show that in terms of recognition of individual citizens, populism advances a less compelling conception of democracy than one committed to the notion of democratic respect advanced in this book. However, the fact that my critical evaluation of populism and its demands for recognition is mainly negative does not mean that I find contemporary liberal democracies to be flawless – far from it. Nor does it mean that I find all populist demands for recognition to be undemocratic or populism's diagnosis of contemporary democracies to be wrongheaded in all respects. Contemporary democracies do suffer from a misrecognition of and lack of respect for certain members of society. Contemporary democracies do suffer from oligarchic tendencies and elite dominance. Contemporary democracies do need to recognize and be more responsive to the demands of ordinary people. Thus, we can and should learn something from the current rise of populism and listen to its demands for recognition. However, we need to be more discerning regarding exactly what these demands consist in, when they help to deepen democracy, and when they rely on ideas that are inconsistent with equal respect for all citizens.

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[10] Kant, "Answer to the Question"; Ellis, *Kant's Politics*, 18; Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 102–17; O'Neill, "Enlightenment as Autonomy," 195; Rostbøll, *Immanuel Kant*, 21–4.

[11] For a similar reading of Kantian respect, see Hill, *Respect, Pluralism, and Justice*, especially 26, 62. For the idea that respect is an attitude and a way of perceiving and experiencing other people, see Buss, "Respect for Persons."

I.1   Populism as a Set of Claims

Democratic Respect is interested in what makes populism appealing to many people. Populism has been on the rise in many countries around the world in the last few decades, and we need to understand not only the causes of this rise but also the *reasons* people might have for supporting populist parties and politicians. A study of reasons differs from a study of causes in that it focuses not on the factual and explanatory question of what actually makes people think or do something (vote for or support a populist party), but on the arguments and justifications that people give – or could give – for thinking and doing what they think and do. Moreover, while we cannot argue with causes as such, we can evaluate reasons and, when needed, counter them with better reasons.

I should stress that to assume that people have reasons for their beliefs and actions, as my approach does, does not imply that they have *good* reasons. I investigate people's reasons for supporting populism precisely in order to consider their validity. Thus, the aim of this book is to study not only what reasons people may have for supporting populist parties, but also whether they have good, democratic reasons for doing so.

It is important to keep in mind this purpose of the book – assessing the validity of the reasons people may have for supporting populism – when we turn to the question of how best to understand and define populism. How best to define a concept depends on the purpose of the study. Definitions are not true or false, but more or less useful for the purpose at hand.[12] Among political scientists who study the causes and effects of populism, there has been much discussion about the difficulties of pinning down the meaning and definition of populism. While these discussions and attempts to find the best definition of populism inform this study, it is important to emphasize that the most appropriate or useful definition of populism for my study might not be the same as for studies with a different purpose. Moreover, recently there seems to have been some convergence in the academic literature on the key features of populism.

While definitions are not true or false per se, it is important for the relevance of this book that my definition of populism should capture or be applicable to the group of parties and politicians that are commonly referred to as "populist," such as Hugo Chávez, the Five Star Movement, the Law and Justice party, Marine Le Pen, Jean-Luc Mélenchon,

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[12] Elster, "Some Notes on 'Populism.'"

Podemos, Viktor Orbán, Matteo Salvini, Geert Wilders, and Donald Trump. I am mainly concerned with contemporary populist parties and less with historical cases such as the US People's Party. We can assess whether it is true that these figures or parties are populist, as I define the term, or to what degree they fit the definition. However, it is absolutely crucial to emphasize that the discussion this book aims to raise is not whether this is that characterization truly captures the essence of populism. Rather, the discussion I want to raise concerns the meaning and validity of a number of claims that can be and often are associated with an ideal typical understanding of populism.

The corollary of being interested in people's reasons for supporting populism is to approach populism as making a set of claims. To claim something is to assert the truth or rightness of something (see Chapter 3). Thus, I view populism as asserting the truth and rightness of a set of both empirical and normative propositions. Moreover, I assume that people support populism because they find these propositional claims valid. The reasons people think they have – or that we may reconstruct them as having – for supporting populism correspond to the claims made by populist politicians. It is this nexus of reasons and claims that I analyze and discuss in this book. Understanding populism as making claims and as something people follow for reasons is part of my participant attitude approach. When people view each other through a participant attitude, they see one another as making claims and acting for reasons, rather than looking for causes that operate behind their backs.

Notice that I am neither claiming that supporters of populism always have the reasons I discuss or that these reasons are what cause support for populism. My aim is to understand and assess – from the perspective of democratic principles of freedom, equality, and respect – the kinds of reason people might have for supporting populism and the claims populists make. While the book aims to discuss the claims of populism and the possible reasons or justifications for believing these claims, the issue of causes is by no means irrelevant for our investigation. My discussion of recognition is prompted by and relies on empirical studies that indicate that the desire for recognition is part of the causal explanation for the rise of populism. Indeed, what follows is grounded in a sustained engagement with empirical research on populism and its supporters, and I hope to show how philosophical analysis and empirical research can enrich one another. Nevertheless, the primary question for our discussion is not the factual one regarding whether the desire for recognition actually explains the support for populism, but rather the normative question of whether the kind of recognition that populism supplies gives people good, democratic reasons for supporting it.

Thus, the idea is that if we are interested in people's reasons for supporting populism, we should define populism in terms of the characteristic claims populists make. However, we need to be more precise here to avoid misunderstanding. It might be said that many people support populism not because they believe in its claims, but because they are attracted to its effects. There is nothing wrong about saying that a person has reason to support or promote a movement or party not because they agree with the content of its claims, but because they think it will have good consequences. For example, if you think that politics needs to be "shaken up" or moved away from the center, this may be a reason to vote for a radical or extremist party, even if you do not agree with its ideology. However, this is not the type of reason I am interested in. I am interested in the types of reason people might have for believing in the content of what populists claim, and not only in its effects. My reason for this focus is the conviction that populism spreads a set of distinct ideas or claims about the very meaning and value of politics and democracy that needs to be properly understood on its merits and countered if found wanting.

Understanding populism as a set of distinctive claims stands in contrast to the often-heard proposition that populism has no substantive content but is a style, a set of rhetorical resources, or a logic of articulation that can be equally used for all ideological purposes.[13] It also stands in contrast to the idea that populism's appeal is only emotional. While later chapters explain why we should see the appeal of populism in terms not only of emotions but also of principles (or more precisely, why the appeal to emotions is mediated by principles), here I emphasize the idea that populism is also characterized by a commitment to some principled positions. While it is true that populists can be found across the political spectrum, from left to right and even in the center, this does not mean that being populist does not carry with it some empirical and normative commitments of its own.[14] Being a populist socialist is not the same ideological position as being a non-populist socialist, being a populist conservative is not the same as being a non-populist conservative, and so on with the other traditional ideologies to which populism can be attached. The adjectival "populist"

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[13] We find the idea that populism has no substantive content of its own in, for example, Brubaker, "Why Populism?"; Kazin, *Populist Persuasion*, 1–5; Laclau, *On Populist Reason*; Moffitt, *Global Rise of Populism*; Mouffe, *For a Left Populism*, 10–11.

[14] Here I agree with Müller (*What Is Populism?*, 10), who writes: "Populism is not anything like a codified doctrine, but it is a set of distinctive claims and has what might be called an inner logic"; and with Galston (*Anti-Pluralism*, 4), who argues that populism is not a vacuous category but "a form of politics that reflects distinctive theoretical commitments and generates its own political practice." See also Canovan, "Taking Politics to the People," 32–3; Urbinati, *Me the People*, 38–9.

brings some additional empirical beliefs and normative commitments to the "host ideology."[15] Moreover, even if the claims and principles of populism are somewhat vague and flexible, they are neither without content nor without effect on how we understand and practice democracy. The language we use to speak about politics and political relations – for example, the way in which we speak of "the people" and political opponents – affects our political culture and transforms political practice.[16]

To view populism as a set of empirical and normative claims falls within an ideational approach and entails regarding populism as a kind of ideology. Understanding populism as an ideology is the most common approach in comparative politics and is mainly associated with the influential definition of populism suggested by Cas Mudde, which sees it as "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people."[17] According to Mudde, populism is not a full or thick ideology like liberalism or socialism, but a "thin" or "thin centered" ideology. Whereas a thick ideology speaks to a broad menu of social, economic, and institutional issues, Mudde suggests that the thin ideology of populism includes a narrower and more restricted set of core ideas and concepts.[18]

While I agree that populism shares some of the characteristics of an ideology, I would like to stress two points. First, calling populism an ideology may be misleading. It might make readers assume that it can be placed on a left-right scale, or that it is defined by its policy positions. But to view populism in that way makes it impossible to see what is shared by all populist movements and parties, which can be found across the traditional left-right political spectrum. Second, the idea that populism is a *thin* ideology disregards what I take to be unique about populism, namely that the claims that define populism are not just fewer in number than those made by traditional ideologies; they are also a different *kind* of claim, or their focus is different. The characteristic claims of populism

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[15] For the idea that populists tend to have a "host" ideology, see Mudde, "Populism," 32.

[16] Laclau (*On Populist Reason*, 10–13) is keenly aware of the fact that language and rhetoric cannot be separated from ideology, but he nevertheless insists that populism as "a logic of articulation" has no specific ideological content. I find his position self-contradictory. It might be connected to the often-made criticism of Laclau that he regards all politics as populist, which makes it impossible to distinguish populist parties from other parties (Arato, "Political Theology and Populism," 157; Mudde, "Populism," 34–6; Müller, "'People Must Be Extracted,'" 484).

[17] Mudde, "Populist Zeitgeist," 543, emphasis altered.

[18] Mudde, "Populism," 30–1. On populism as a thin ideology, see also Abts and Rummens, "Populism versus Democracy," 407–9; Canovan, "Taking Politics to the People," 32.