

Far-right intellectual discourse about populism: the case of the German Institut für Staatspolitik

Shroufi, Omran; De Cleen, Benjamin

Published in:
Journal of Political Ideologies

DOI:
[10.1080/13569317.2022.2066154](https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2022.2066154)

Publication date:
2024

Document Version:
Final published version

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Shroufi, O., & De Cleen, B. (2024). Far-right intellectual discourse about populism: the case of the German Institut für Staatspolitik. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 29(2), 330-351.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2022.2066154>

Copyright

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form, without the prior written permission of the author(s) or other rights holders to whom publication rights have been transferred, unless permitted by a license attached to the publication (a Creative Commons license or other), or unless exceptions to copyright law apply.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document infringes your copyright or other rights, please contact openaccess@vub.be, with details of the nature of the infringement. We will investigate the claim and if justified, we will take the appropriate steps.



Far-right intellectual discourse about populism: the case of the German Institut für Staatspolitik

Omran Shroufi & Benjamin De Cleen

To cite this article: Omran Shroufi & Benjamin De Cleen (2022): Far-right intellectual discourse about populism: the case of the German Institut für Staatspolitik, Journal of Political Ideologies, DOI: [10.1080/13569317.2022.2066154](https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2022.2066154)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2022.2066154>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 22 Apr 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Far-right intellectual discourse about populism: the case of the German Institut für Staatspolitik

Omran Shroufi^a and Benjamin De Cleen^b

^aDepartment of Politics, University of York, York, UK; ^bCommunication Studies Department, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussels, Belgium

ABSTRACT

Despite the ubiquity of work on the populism of the far right, explicit analysis of far-right populist strategizing and discourse *about* populism has been rare. This article explores such far-right reflections on populism through the publications of the German *Institut für Staatspolitik*, an organization at the heart of the intellectual *Neue Rechte* and close to parts of the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD). We find a sympathetic attitude towards populism, a rejection of mainstream anti-populism and a readiness to learn from left-wing theories of populism. Whilst partially overlapping with left populist critique of technocratic neoliberalism, *Neue Rechte* reflections about populism are decidedly embedded within an ecosystem of far-right nationalist and anti-liberal discourse. With nationalism seen as a precondition of successful populist strategy, the far right's innate awareness of the 'true' national nature of 'the people' is seen as giving it a winning advantage over supposedly naïve left populists unable to grasp this 'fact'.

Introduction

Both in public discourse and academia, accusations of populism abound, levelled against those who refuse to abide by the accepted rules of reasoned and moderate political discourse. At the same time, a positive conception of populism continues to be a source of serious theoretical and strategic debate, especially among left-wing academics and activists.¹ Populism here is not an insult but the label for a political strategy, one that calls on the left to abandon consensual and technocratic third-way centrism, and instead bring diverse, progressive demands together in opposition to technocratic and neoliberal ruling elites.

Such conscious and theoretically informed reflections on populism, however, are less common on the right, despite the obvious centrality of populist strategies to many (far-) right parties and leaders across the world. Steve Bannon's highly mediatized attempt at forming a 'populist international' was largely unsuccessful, and other far-right leaders have done little more than sporadically respond to the 'populism' charge by using it as proof of their closeness to 'the people'.² Yet, away from the limelight, other right-wing activists and intellectuals have also thoroughly deliberated populism's strategic potential for political movements on the far right.

CONTACT Omran Shroufi  omran.shroufi@york.ac.uk

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

Despite broad agreement that many contemporary far-right parties *are* populist,³ there has been little sustained analysis of the far right's *own* explicit theoretical reflections on and strategic engagement with populism.⁴ Simultaneously, in recent literature critically analysing discourses *about* populism, reflections on the far-right's own discourse *about* populism have been rare.⁵

This is where our article steps in, asking how the far right responds to and interacts with broader debates about populism, whether it views and understands populism a manner similar to its political opponents, what meaning is attributed to populism in far-right discourse and what role these reflections about populism play in far-right strategic discussions. We probe these questions through an analysis of publications by the German *Institut für Staatspolitik* (IfS – Institute for State Policy), a key actor within the 'metapolitical' *Neue Rechte* (New Right) in Germany.⁶ As we are first and foremost concerned with far-right discourse *about* 'populism', rather than populist rhetoric *per se*, we focus specifically on IfS studies and articles that explicitly and deliberately discuss populism.

We start with a brief overview of existing debates about populism, focusing on prevailing anti-populist discourse – in academia and beyond – and discussions on (the merits of) populist strategy as formulated by left-wing intellectuals, in particular, those authors cited in our IfS corpus. We show how populism is usually characterized pejoratively across media and political discourse – as well as in mainstream political science – with the few voices openly defending populism mostly found on the left. Following from this, we show how debates about populism, whilst maybe not as extensive, have not been completely missing on the far right, with several far-right intellectuals offering a favourable reading of 'the populist moment'. We then present the IfS and explain its role as an intellectual hub within the German *Neue Rechte*, highlighting the institute's close relations with nativist forces within the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD – Alternative for Germany), before moving onto our analysis of the discourse about populism as found in IfS publications.

What we find are reflections that engage with existing academic and public debates on populism to denounce mainstream anti-populist discourse, but also highlight the potential of populism for the far right. Comfortable with the accusation of populism, the IfS authors re-signify such attacks as evidence of the far right's closeness to 'the people'. As such, we see how the IfS makes use of a favourable discursive environment in which nativist, xenophobic or authoritarian ideas and policies are denounced as 'populist'. Yet these discussions do not simply re-appropriate the populism label; they are theoretically informed reflections that enter into conversation both with centrist anti-populists and with those in favour of left-wing populism. Indeed, what stands out is a willingness to borrow and apply insights from left-wing theories of populism and learn from 'the other side'. Similarly, we find a discourse partly in agreement with the left's diagnosis of 'the populist moment', sharing a critique of the liberal-centrist establishment and global capitalism. Yet, there are crucial differences. Compared to the left's, the far-right's populist strategy is strongly overdetermined by a nativist conception of who belongs to 'the people' – and who doesn't – and an anti-globalism rooted in debates on identity and national sovereignty, rather than equality. These ideas feed into the key argument underpinning the IfS discourse about populism, namely that the far-right's populism is inherently more potent because its nationalist conception of 'the people' is more authentic than the left's more open and heterogeneous alternative.

The debate(s) about populism

Populism largely remains a negative and pejorative term in contemporary debate. In both its left and right varieties, populism is considered a threat to liberal democracy, be it because of its anti-pluralism, its pandering to the base emotions of common people, its lack of respect for expertise and science, its irresponsible economic policies, its hostility towards ethnic or other minorities, or all of the above.⁷ The anti-populist argument⁸ comes in different shapes, ranging from the elitist defence of technocratic neoliberal reforms, to concerns for hard-fought liberal rights in the face of right-wing demagogues; from the dismissal of populism as the most pressing threat to democracy, to the more measured appreciation of populism as a ‘threat and corrective for democracy’.⁹

Whilst the anti-populist position dominates political and media discourse, it also features heavily in academic debate. Here, Cas Mudde’s much-cited definition of populism – ‘as a thin-centred 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’¹⁰ – has been particularly influential.¹¹ As a ‘thin’ ideology, populism needs to be combined with a so-called ‘host ideology’ to bring it to life, whereby the ensuing normative evaluation partly depends on the host ideology in question. While Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser have stressed that populism is both a ‘threat’ and a ‘corrective’ for democracy – in that it can help give a voice to disenfranchised groups¹² – the underlying normative position remains that populism, whilst not opposed to democracy *per se*, is opposed to liberal democracy because of the inherent anti-pluralism underpinning conceptions of ‘the people’ and the privilege given to the majoritarian democratic logic over individual and minority rights.¹³

Compared to these omnipresent *critiques* of populism, and despite the extensive use of populist strategies by politicians left, right and centre, deliberate and explicit arguments in favour of populist politics are few and far between. Those openly committed to populist strategy are mostly to be found on the left,¹⁴ even if here too significant concerns have been raised.¹⁵

For those in favour of a left-wing populism, the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe¹⁶ has been particularly influential. For Laclau and Mouffe, populism is a political logic that consists of forging ties between disparate unsatisfied demands in joint opposition to the ‘establishment’ or ‘power bloc’. ‘The people’, they argue, is not a sociological category, but emerges discursively through the construction of a ‘chain of equivalence’ between different popular demands, unified through a shared opposition to those who frustrate their demands.¹⁷ These ideas have been central to academic debates on left populist politics and the dangers of mainstream ‘anti-populism’.¹⁸ Moreover, Laclau and Mouffe have also inspired left populist political movements, with *Podemos* in Spain perhaps the clearest example.¹⁹

For its left-wing proponents, the left needs to pursue a populist strategy if it is to have any chance of revitalizing democracy and ending an era of technocratic neoliberalism and ‘post-democratic’ governance. These proposals are also explicitly a response to the strength of the far right: left populism is seen as the only viable means to halt the rise of the far right.²⁰

Far-right reflections about populism

We use the term ‘far right’ here to refer to a broad body of parties, organizations, activists and intellectuals who operate in a space stretching from the *radical* right – which accepts the basic tenets of democratic politics but looks to exclude unwanted cultural-religious-ethnic others – all the way to the more *extreme* right – which questions the fundamental principles of democracy and espouses a more explicitly ethnic version of national belonging.²¹ Clearly, the far right is not inherently populist. Historically, many far-right movements were explicitly elitist and anti-democratic²² – and many on the *extreme* end remain so today.²³ However, most successful contemporary or reformed *radical* right parties have embraced democracy, at least rhetorically,²⁴ and position themselves in opposition to ‘the elite’ by claiming to speak in the name of ‘the ordinary people’.²⁵ Indeed, alongside nativism, ethnopluralism, and a pronounced hostility towards Muslims,²⁶ many analysts consider populism to be a central feature of contemporary ‘populist radical right’ parties.²⁷

While there is little doubt populism has been successfully *practised* by some far-right forces, the far-right’s own debate *about* populism has not been as sustained and prominent as it has been on the left (see above). This is not to say, however, there has been no significant reflection on the concept and practice of populism on the right.²⁸ Yet academic attention for such reflections has been rare – even though far-right parties are often (euphemistically) labelled as populist²⁹ – symptomatic of a broader overemphasis on electoral politics³⁰ and inattention to far-right intellectualism.³¹

While some far-right reflections reproduce the dominant negative connotation of populism, other far-right politicians have appropriated the term in response to the ‘populist’ accusation levelled against them. Typical of such a response is Marine Le Pen’s (*Rassemblement National*, formerly *Front National*) statement in a 2017 interview: ‘what’s populism? If it’s someone who wants to defend government for the people, of the people and by the people, then yes, I’m a populist’.³²

Over and above such sporadic appropriations of the ‘populist’ label, there has been some more sustained engagement with the concept of populism at the level of far-right party politics. Alexander Gauland, previously co-parliamentary leader of the AfD, published an article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* titled, *Why does it have to be populism?*³³ In the opinion piece, Gauland depicted and defended populism as the manifestation of a conflict between a new globalized class of ‘Weltbürger’ (world citizens) who stand opposed to the traditional middle class and ‘so-called simple people’, both of who, he argues, cannot just up sticks when the ‘reality’ of globalization hits home: ‘From inside a penthouse, globalisation looks much more friendly than it does on a council estate’.³⁴ In 2019, Gauland also delivered a speech about ‘populism and democracy’ at the IfS *Winterakademie*, later published in the IfS journal *Sezession* – and included in our corpus.

A further case is Timo Soini, co-founder and ex-leader of *Perussuomalaiset* (Finns Party), who has spoken extensively about populism.³⁵ He defended his master thesis about populism in 1988, and, after leaving the party, published the book *Populismi* in 2020,³⁶ which was also later translated into English. According to Elmgren, Soini challenges the derogatory use of the label ‘populism’, instead seeing populism as ‘an “open” ideology that merely channels the wishes of the ordinary people’³⁷ to protect their national culture and cultural homogeneity against migration and the supranational politics forced upon ‘them’ by the elite.

Whilst not fitting the far-right epithet in its entirety, the significant tradition of populist rhetoric on the US right cannot go unmentioned either. Frank³⁸ writes that in the US, '[t]he Right's war on the establishment has been the inescapable political soundtrack of the last forty years', with Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, Patrick Buchanan and Donald Trump some of the key figures. Most interesting is that the Republicans' move 'from establishmentarianism to populism'³⁹ was accompanied by explicit reflections on populist strategy.⁴⁰ In recent years, Steve Bannon – who headed the far-right Breitbart News and Donald Trump's populist 2016 presidential campaign – has probably been the most visible advocate of a self-consciously populist strategy, both in the US, and later in Europe, as he tried, and ultimately failed, to mobilize far-right parties to become part of 'The Movement' in joint opposition to the globalist elite of the 'party of Davos'.⁴¹

More theoretically informed explorations of populism can be found in far-right intellectual circles. According to Zúquete,⁴² the right-wing defence of populism has been most developed in France.⁴³ The French *Nouvelle Droite* thinker Alain de Benoist is the most prominent of these voices, with his work on populism resonating with far-right audiences across Europe and the US.⁴⁴ The title of his 2017 book *Le moment populiste: droite-gauche, c'est fini* (The populist moment: right-left, it's finished) captures his thesis about a people/elite cleavage replacing the left/right one as the defining divide of our times. In de Benoist's work too, we see a rejection of anti-populist forces – with populism equated to opposing a globalist elite – but also an explicit rejection of global capitalism and liberal individualism in the name of 'the people'. Inspired by amongst others de Benoist,⁴⁵ the Russian far-right intellectual Alexander Dugin also posits populism as an antidote to liberalism.⁴⁶ According to Dugin's 'Fourth Political Theory', fascism, communism and liberalism, the three leading ideologies of the 20th century, have all failed,⁴⁷ leaving in their place 'the people' as the key protagonist of modern times.⁴⁸

While these are only some prominent examples of far-right engagement with populism, what they do make clear is that there has been some significant discussion about populism on the far right. Moreover, we see how far-right reflections on populism explicitly enter into dialogue with dominant anti-populist discourses, with populism acquiring a more positive meaning, and opposition to populism re-signified as a sign of weakness and moral bankruptcy on the part of 'the elite'. Whilst there is significant diversity within far-right discourse about populism, for example, as regards the relation to capitalism, what is clear is that the populist notions of 'the elite' and 'the people' acquire their meaning through their integration into broader far-right discourse: The 'globalist elite' stands opposed to 'ordinary people's' attachment to a nationally rooted identity, and the values of a detached progressive/liberal 'elite' are rejected in the name of the 'ordinary people'.

Institut für Staatspolitik

With this article, we further explore such far-right reflections on populism as found in the publications of the German *Institut für Staatspolitik* (IfS). Engaged in 'independent political education work' on 'political and metapolitical questions',⁴⁹ the IfS is a key protagonist within the German *Neue Rechte*, a loosely associated intellectual

network⁵⁰ involved in a counter-hegemonic conservative project in the spirit of the conservative revolution of the Weimar Republic⁵¹ – a project which resisted the liberal, democratic and egalitarian spirit of the time. The *Neue Rechte* functions as ‘a network at the conjunction of conservatism and right extremism’,⁵² highlighting its role as a space in which far-right ideas are incubated and diffused among other political actors.⁵³ Such contemporary metapolitical efforts on the far right are often traced back to the French *Nouvelle Droite* and its ‘Gramscian fight’ for right-wing cultural hegemony.⁵⁴

Within the contemporary *Neue Rechte*, the IfS plays a key role.⁵⁵ Founded in 2000 by Karlheinz Weißmann and Götz Kubitschek in Schnellroda in the Eastern German state of Saxony-Anhalt, the IfS aims to cultivate an alternative elite to what it considers to be the dominant liberal left one.⁵⁶ Kubitschek is a well-known figure on the *Neue Rechte* and was a frequent speaker at the Dresden-based PEGIDA⁵⁷ rallies. As an organization, the IfS closely resembles a think tank, functioning as an intellectual space to deliberate and exchange views in Germany and Europe, ‘mingling intellectualism with street activism’.⁵⁸ Key to the institute’s work is the journal *Sezession*, edited by Kubitschek, which has become a leading *Neue Rechte* publication.⁵⁹ The institute also publishes and commissions extended studies (*Wissenschaftliche Reihe*) and hosts activists at its summer and winter academies serving as an intellectual cadre school,⁶⁰ where prominent figures on the far right, including AfD’s Gauland and Alice Weidel, have been speakers.

Whilst the IfS is not officially affiliated with the AfD, it has been able to form strong links with the *völkisch* nationalist wing of the party,⁶¹ represented by figures such as Björn Höcke, leader of the AfD in the state of Thuringia, and the now-officially disbanded nativist wing *der Flügel*. Following the March 2020 decision of the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (VS – *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*) to declare *der Flügel* an extremist organization – a decision which authorized the state to make full use of its security service capabilities – the party leadership called on *der Flügel* to disband, fearing these measures could eventually extend to the party in its entirety. Höcke was unimpressed, however, and used an *Sezession* interview⁶² with Kubitschek, a close ally and personal friend,⁶³ to express his displeasure with the reaction of the AfD leadership. Even though Kubitschek is not a party member, he has sought to influence the direction of the AfD,⁶⁴ and sees the potential for far-right ideas to resonate through the party.⁶⁵ And while the AfD as a whole is considered to be a more ‘modern’ radical right party,⁶⁶ what unites the IfS and nativist forces inside the AfD is a refusal to broaden their appeal through a more moderate tone and message, indeed both the IfS and the Thuringia branch of the AfD are considered extremist entities by the respective regional offices of the VS.⁶⁷

Material and method

We focused our research on the IfS’ two main recurring publications *Wissenschaftliche Reihe* and *Sezession*. The *Wissenschaftliche Reihe* are in-depth studies with a thematic focus, such as immigration or national identity. At the time of writing, the IfS had published 39 studies over a nine-year period. *Sezession* is the IfS’ ‘right-intellectual magazine’ which does not aim to reach ‘as many readers as possible’ but rather ‘the

right readers' who are interested in the 'complexity of the world' and the 'sophistication of right-wing, conservative thinking'.⁶⁸ *Sezession* is released on a bimonthly basis, with three thematic and three 'open' issues published each year. *Sezession* is proud of the metapolitical successes of the journal, writing that '[m]uch of what appears and is fundamental, uncompromising, non-negotiable and combative about the AfD and other resistance projects was thought ahead in our magazine, formulated and first fed into the debate. You couldn't ask for more from a metapolitical journal project!'.⁶⁹

Searching through the archives of these two publications, we collected all texts with the word 'Populis*' (*Populismus*, *Populist* and *populistisch*) in the title. We complemented this with a manual exploration to ensure we also included other relevant materials without the word populism in the title. Initially, we extended our search to also include texts with the words 'Volk' and 'Elite' (the core signifiers of populist discourse) in the title. This resulted in a further 21 texts, including two special issues of *Sezession* on 'Volk' and 'Elite' respectively. Our analysis of these texts, however, made clear that these were not meta-reflections on populism, and nor did they reproduce populist positions (see section 'the debate(s) about populism'). As our explicit focus is on far-right discourse *about* populism, we did not include these texts in our corpus.

With our selection limited to articles substantively discussing populism, our corpus does not aim to give an exhaustive overview of every mention of the word 'populism' in IfS publications, or indeed ask whether, to what extent and in what ways the IfS' discourse can be considered populist. Rather, it offers a comprehensive overview of those IfS materials that explicitly and meaningfully deal with 'populism', be it as a label, accusation, ideology or strategy. Our final corpus includes 12 texts: 11 articles in *Sezession*, and one dedicated issue of the *Wissenschaftliche Reihe*. Table 1 in the appendix offers an overview of the corpus.

We analysed this corpus following the principles of what has been labelled discourse-theoretical analysis,⁷⁰ which compared to more linguistically inspired modes of discourse analysis, has a more macro-approach to the study of discourse.⁷¹ Language use is studied with the aim of identifying the structure of discourse, in our case, looking at how the signifier 'populism' and the main populist signifiers ('the people' and 'the elite') acquire meaning in relation to other signifiers. Key here is how the IfS discourse about populism links the notion of populism to the core ideological components of the far right as well as how the IfS' discourse relates to competing discourses about populism (see section 'the debate(s) about populism').

Looking at the IfS discourse through this lens, our analysis follows the general qualitative-interpretive principles and coding procedures of qualitative content analysis⁷² and of constructivist grounded theory.⁷³ We pay attention to all aspects of the IfS' use of language to identify the structure of its discourse about populism, taking inspiration from the more micro-linguistic strategies of Critical Discourse Analysis.⁷⁴ Besides an interest in *arguments*, we look at *vocabulary*, paying special attention to, amongst others, the labels used to denote 'the people' and 'the elite' and the signifiers that appear in relation to the signifier 'populism'. It is also crucial to look at *semantic relations* as 'discourses may use the same words [...] but they may use them differently, and it is only through focusing upon *semantic relations* that one can identify these differences'.⁷⁵ We pay particular attention to how

‘populism’, ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ are linked to other signifiers, both those valued positively by the far right – such as ‘the nation’ and ‘Western values’ – and those valued negatively – e.g. ‘globalism’, ‘migration’, ‘liberalism’ and ‘Islam’.

The contours of IfS discourse about populism

Before turning to our analysis, we can already draw some conclusions from the contours of the corpus itself. First, 11 texts devoted to populism in *Sezession* (across 96 issues), and one issue out of 39 *Wissenschaftliche Reihe*, remains a modest number. IfS publications focus more consistently on core aspects of far-right ideology, history and key thinkers. Nationalism, European civilization, the rejection of multiculturalism, migration, Islam and conservatism are more prominent topics. Much is written about the history of the far right and authors that have been an inspiration, including Martin Heidegger, Friedrich Nietzsche, Carl Schmitt, Oswald Spengler, Ernst Jünger and Armin Mohler.

Even when speaking about ‘Volk’ and ‘Elite’ – as we concluded from our preliminary analysis of articles with ‘Volk’ or ‘Elite’ in their title (see above) – there is only a tenuous link to populism. Most IfS articles use the term ‘Volk’ as a nationalist category (rather than to refer to the populist category of ‘ordinary people’), whilst references to the ‘Elite’ were often not critiques of ‘the elite’ *per se* but reflections on the contemporary absence of a ‘true’ (nationalist, conservative) elite. Whilst this article focuses solely on explicit reflections *about* populism, our exploratory analysis of other articles referring to ‘Volk’ and ‘Elite’ does raise at least two significant questions that we cannot answer in any detail in the space of this article: 1) Are the IfS’ explicit reflections *about* populism, which are largely positive, indicative of the populist nature of the IfS’ discourse more generally? (Our exploratory analysis seems to indicate they are not); 2) What are the connections and potential tensions between the populist critique of *current* elites and the rather more elitist ponderings on the necessity of a *worthy* elite?

Second, the texts in our corpus tend to straddle theory and practice, engaging in intellectual debate on populism while remaining concerned with the potentials and limitations of populism for far-right politics, in particular, the fate of the AfD. For example, the lengthy IfS study on populism – *Die Stunde des Populismus* – is divided in two main substantive sections, ‘the theory of populism’ and ‘populism in political practice’, with a smaller section on ‘the Alternative for Germany and populism’.

Finally, as [Table 1](#) in the appendix shows, whilst our corpus dates to 2003, reflections on populism became more frequent from 2017 onwards, after Brexit and the election of Trump as US president. The IfS discourse about populism, in other words, has been produced at a time of intense discussion about populism across media, politics and academia.

IfS discourse about populism within ‘the populist moment’

Explicitly located within this broader discursive environment, the IfS articles draw on an array of voices to conceptualize populism and take a position in opposition to mainstream anti-populist discourse. They also engage with a wide range of sympathetic perspectives on populism originating on both the right and left. This is evident not

only in reflections on left-populist politics in Germany (*Aufstehen, Die Linke*) and elsewhere in Europe (*Podemos*, Jean-Luc Mélenchon), but also in extensive and substantive engagement with left-wing authors.

Across the corpus, we find references to several important works on populism, both those published by academics mainly known in Germany (e.g. Franck Decker, Florian Hartleb, Karin Priester) as well as internationally renowned authors. This includes recent writings on populism by Chantal Mouffe, Yascha Mounk and Jan-Werner Müller⁷⁶ but also in some cases⁷⁷ much older key works, such as Canovan's 1981 *Populism*, and Laclau's 1977 *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism*.

The conceptualization of populism contained in IfS publications reveals (as it does in much academic literature) a judgment about the desirability of populism. Like others on the far right (see section 'far-right reflections about populism'), several IfS articles deride what is framed as the mainstream's anti-populism and criticize how media and politicians use 'the populism insult to stigmatise political opponents'.⁷⁸ They refer to some academic work in a similar vein. The German-born Jan-Werner Müller, whose 2017 book *What is Populism*⁷⁹ argues populism is inherently anti-pluralist and thus a danger for democracy, is attacked for his weaponization of the populist label in defence of the establishment.⁸⁰ This is also true for Yascha Mounk, another US-based German-born academic. In a review of the German translation of his book *The People vs. Democracy*, Mounk is derided as part of the very globalist elite, which populist forces oppose.⁸¹

By contrast, the articles in our corpus develop a more positive stance towards populism, again in line with the other far-right proponents of populism (see above). A key point of reference is Alain de Benoist, whose text *Populismus*,⁸² published by the *Neue Rechte* magazine *Junge Freiheit*, is regularly cited, as is his more recent monograph *Le moment populiste: droite-gauche, c'est fini*.⁸³ In 2020, *Sezession* published a conversation between the IfS author Benedikt Kaiser and de Benoist reflecting on the current state of populism in world politics.⁸⁴ IfS authors also draw on other authors sympathetic to populism and critical of liberalism and/or migration. Hoschützky refers to Christopher Lasch's⁸⁵ *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy*, a 1995 book in which the American historian criticizes the liberal elite's cosmopolitanism. Gauland cites approvingly from David Goodhart's, *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics*,⁸⁶ and borrows the author's notion of a conflict between 'Anywheres' and 'Somewheres', as does Kaiser in his assessment of the AfD (see below).

That the name of de Benoist, Lasch or Goodhart would appear in IfS publications is unsurprising. More striking is the engagement with left-wing authors, in particular, Laclau and Mouffe. This is especially the case in the articles written by Kaiser such as *Querfrontpotential? Populismus bei Laclau und Mouffe* (Cross-front potential: Populism by Laclau and Mouffe) and *Die Lücke, das Volk, die Linke* (The Gap, the People, the Left). Kaiser also wrote a review of Mouffe's *For a Left Populism*. The longer IfS study *Die Stunde des Populismus* (The Hour of Populism) also explores the work of Laclau and Mouffe in some detail. Laclau's⁸⁷ older work on populism is also cited in the 2003 article *Der Populismus – Eine postmoderne Rechte?* (Populism – a Postmodern Right?).

The IfS' diagnosis of 'the populist moment' has much in common with that of others across the political spectrum. That is, 'the people' feel disconnected from 'the elite', and as a result, we are living through 'the hour of populism' (as the IfS calls it⁸⁸) or 'the populist moment'.⁸⁹ Even as far back as 2003, *Sezession* published an article, which presented populism as a manifestation of – as well as legitimate answer to – this crisis of political representation. According to Hoschützky:

[Populism] fundamentally questions existing political relations. It snubs the political elites as it takes it upon itself to seize the mood (*Stimmung*) existing among the people and give it political form. In doing so, it reproaches the established parties for no longer representing the people and regards itself as a renewer of democracy.⁹⁰

In a review of the 2017 German translation of the Belgian David Van Reybrouck's *For a different populism: A plea (Pleidooi voor populisme)*, Kaiser suggests the author correctly diagnoses 'a growing awareness gap between the academic upper class and broad sections of the people, the arrogance of the elite, the crisis of political representation'.⁹¹ Van Reybrouck shows how populism is symptomatic of 'the deep-rooted problem of western societies',⁹² with populism characterized as a corrective force to such corrosive forces. Similarly, Hoschützky⁹³ suggests populist movements respond to and counter, 'in the name of democracy', the deficits of current societal developments. Populist parties are cleaning up what is otherwise a 'parasitically infected political system' in order to defend 'the concerns of the "simple man on the street"'.⁹⁴

Populism, anti-globalism and nationalism

This diagnosis of a crisis of political representation, and framing of populism as the democratic antidote, is similar to that underlying left-wing populism. That the authors in our corpus favour a form of populism, and speak with some respect for left populists, is significant, but crucial questions remain: What is the nature of the crisis of representation? In what ways does the elite not represent the people? If populism is the answer, what should this populism look like? Who are 'the people' of that populism, and what do they want?

Here, we begin to see the hallmarks of a decidedly *far-right* discourse about populism, profoundly embedded within a radically nationalist and anti-globalist discourse. Indeed, populism becomes almost synonymous with resistance to globalization. The AfD's Gauland argues:

My theory is so: Populism appears when an establishment more or less breaks the societal contract with a people. That is, breaks with its people. The modern populism is a global movement against the all-pervading power of globalisation. A movement of the settled against the mobile, the particularists against the universalists, of democrats against autocrats. I don't need to clarify on which side the AfD stands.⁹⁵

Referring to Goodhart's 'Anywheres' and 'Somewheres', Gauland claims populism is an antagonism between a *globalized* and *cosmopolitan* elite on one side and those who value home, community and tradition on the other.⁹⁶ Seen from this angle, populism is an opposition to the dictates of a globalized elite, which, it is argued, is working towards the creation of a multi-ethnic polity at the expense of those who hitherto belonged to the

(monoethnic and monocultural) nation. And as Lichtmesz argues, in his review and critique of Yascha Mounk's *The People vs. Democracy*, populism is a reaction to this very globalist 'experiment':

What he [Mounk] calls 'populism' is nothing more than a reaction to the politics he propagates, which consists of importing large numbers of 'ethnic and religious minorities' into 'monoethnic and monocultural' nations.⁹⁷

In his conversation with *Sezession*, de Benoist similarly describes a political class that 'has become an oligarchy, which appears de-territorialised (*entterritorialisiert*)' and no longer operates along the logic of clearly defined geographical space.⁹⁸ Kaiser claims de Benoist's theory of populism helps explain both a rupture between the people and the ruling classes, as well as a 'revolt of *globalisation's critics against "the globalists"*'.⁹⁹

We see how a globalist-nationalist divide becomes aligned with the elite-people antagonism. In the discourse of the IfS, 'the ordinary people' are national – a subgroup of the exclusive ethnic-culturally defined nation – *and* also nationalist and indeed *nativist* in that they value this ethnic-cultural belonging and oppose globalization and multiculturalism. By contrast, the globalism of 'the elite' disconnects it from 'the people'. Populism is born, it is argued, out of the incompatibility of territorially and ethnically determined identities. This conceptualization of populism legitimizes nationalist and anti-globalist positions as being those of 'the ordinary people', and discredits its opponents, across politics, media, the arts and academia, for their elitist and globalist defence of ethnic and cultural diversity.

Anti-populism as proof of globalist and liberal elitism

As the previous section already indicates, the IfS articles turn the anti-populist critique on its head; the anti-populist rhetoric of politicians, journalists and academics is depicted as an obvious attempt to discredit political opponents. Rather than accept its own failings, the argument goes, the elite points its finger at the populist bogeyman.

But there is more. The elite's anti-populism is said to reveal its disdain of and detachment from *the people*. The elite's indifference is juxtaposed with that of the populists, framed as the true democrats wanting to return power to the sovereign people. It is these opposing worldviews that Gauland argues 'distinguishes the populists from the establishment [...] We're not afraid of the people'.¹⁰⁰ The accusation of populism voiced by centrist elites inadvertently confirms those labelled as such are indeed 'the voice of ordinary people':

Democrats against Autocrats? Am I trying to claim the populists speak in the name of the people? Well actually not, I'm not claiming that – it is the spokespeople (Wortführer) of the globalists themselves that say that.¹⁰¹

The anti-populists are depicted as a small elite who have shunned their 'own' countries to join a new class of world citizens. In doing so, they stand opposed to an alliance of *national* working and middle classes,¹⁰² revealing the elites' disdain of and detachment from *the nation*. Such critiques of anti-populism reproduce the populism-versus-liberalism narrative but turn its normative evaluation on its head. Whereas critics such as Mounk view populism as a threat to liberal democracy – Mounk's book in German is

titled *The fall of Democracy: How populism threatens the rule of law* – Lichtmesz frames *liberalism* as the real threat to democracy. Mounk's book, Lichtmesz argues, should instead be called 'The fall of liberalism': 'Mounk's "we" is nothing but that of those elites who want to push through this [globalist] project from above'.¹⁰³ That is to say, the elite's anti-populism stands opposed to both the people *and* the nation, highlighting how closely intertwined the two concepts are in the IfS discourse.

Populist economics: the 'little man' and 'anywheres on the right'

These reflections on populism, however, cannot be reduced to a legitimization of nationalism and anti-globalism alone. There is also an anti-liberal dimension, which in the name of an 'organic' people, goes beyond a rejection of globalism, and extends to a critique of progressive values, individualism *as well as* global capitalism and the marketization of human relations.

De Benoist, interviewed by Kaiser, makes this point clearly. Liberalism, he argues, is the 'main enemy' (*Hauptfeind*) and he rebuts those right-wing populists and conservatives who seemingly do not fully grasp the 'fact' that societal and economic liberalism are inextricably linked.

Unfortunately a section of the right, habitually and for reasons of defending its own material interests, describes itself as 'liberal', without realizing that liberalism only defends individual freedom in order to pit it against every kind of community project [...] Liberal-conservatives are people who accept economic liberalism, but not societal liberalism, just as some left-wingers accept societal liberalism but not economic liberalism. It's about time to recognize that both these forms of liberalism [...] are inseparably tied together.¹⁰⁴

Here we clearly see how reflections on populism, besides legitimizing nationalism, extend to other aspects of the far-right project. The DNA of populism, it is argued, sets it on a different trajectory to a *non-populist* right-wing strategy. Whereas the right is normally associated with the free market, populism is understood to be a by-product and rejection of modern global capitalism, with populism bringing lower classes and impoverished middle classes together in 'a new historical block'.¹⁰⁵

Hoschützky,¹⁰⁶ in a much earlier text, differentiates between a populism that sides with the interests of middle managers and neoliberal reforms – which he frames as the previous strategy of far-right movements – with a more effective and potent populism that speaks to broad groups within society and is consciously supportive of 'sub-bourgeois classes'. In *Die Stunde des Populismus* (The Hour of Populism),¹⁰⁷ it is those parties which have limited themselves to a populist *style* – and not a true populist socioeconomic programme – that are deemed to have fared less well. This includes Geert Wilders, who supposedly did not focus on 'the people or a particular popular class'¹⁰⁸ and was not anti-establishment on questions pertaining to market reforms or NATO. Equally, de Benoist is disappointed with the market liberal tendencies of other right-wing populists, 'including Donald Trump, who said that one does not wish to slow down capitalism or Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro, who during the coronavirus epidemic, was more worried about rescuing "the economy" than rescuing human lives'.¹⁰⁹ By contrast, it is those politicians embodying a populist worldview and a closeness to the people – also

in socio-economic terms – which are deemed the *better* populists. Marine Le Pen is presented as such an example, having managed to conduct herself in a manner ‘classically populist’ by demarcating a clear boundary between her party and the elite.¹¹⁰

Populism, from this perspective, can be effectively utilized if the right is willing to put itself squarely on the side of the ‘little man’¹¹¹ and abandon the liberal socio-economic preferences of the middle classes. This is reflected in discussions on the AfD and whether the party’s urban ordoliberalists will gain the upper hand over its anti-liberal nationalists. By failing to meaningfully engage with the social problems of ‘ordinary people’, it is argued the party risks ‘produc[ing] *Anywheres* on the right’.¹¹² That is, using Goodhart’s terminology (see earlier section on IFS and the ‘populist moment’), merely swapping one detached elite for another, albeit a more nationalist one:

Only an AfD, which stands up for the neglected *Somewheres* as the majority of the population, has its genuine right to exist and the potential [to become] a truly society-changing Alternative for Germany.¹¹³

Left-wing inspirations for a right-wing populism

In developing their conceptualization of populism, the authors in our corpus do not just link populism to a critique of economic liberalism, but show a broader interest in left-populist movements, such as *Aufstehen* and *La France Insoumise*, and a remarkable willingness to learn and borrow from theories of populism associated with the left. This follows an older tradition of learning from the ‘other side’, visible in the *Nouvelle Droite*’s so-called right-wing Gramscianism.¹¹⁴ This is most clearly illustrated by the numerous and substantial references to the work of Laclau and Mouffe. It is claimed their theory of populism, by seeking to unite subaltern groups against political and economic elites, resonates with political actors across the political spectrum,¹¹⁵ and that there is ‘no doubt that Laclau and Mouffe’s approaches can also be fruitful for the political Right – at least for those movements critical of liberalism and capitalism’.¹¹⁶

Indeed, Kaiser, who published several articles exploring the potentials of Laclau and Mouffe for far-right movements, writes in his review of *For a Left Populism* that Mouffe’s statements on the ‘liberal capitalist order and the reinstatement of genuine democratic relations are certainly compatible for “right populists”’.¹¹⁷ In ‘*Querfrontpotential? Populismus bei Laclau und Mouffe*’ (Cross-front potential? Populism in Laclau and Mouffe), Kaiser argues that populism, understood as a critique of capitalism and liberalism in the name of ‘the people’, offers the potential to build bridges across different political camps. This is captured by the term ‘*Querfront*’,¹¹⁸ which roughly translates as ‘Cross-front’ or ‘lateral-front’, a practice dating back to the efforts of the ‘young conservatives’ during the Weimer Republic.¹¹⁹

Three aspects of Laclau and Mouffe’s work are deemed particularly insightful and relevant for the right.¹²⁰ First, Laclau and Mouffe recognized ‘that the left must re-enter the emotional sphere’¹²¹; a purely rational and intellectual form of politics will never connect with ‘regular people’. Second, Mouffe recognized that ‘the presence of a real opponent is key’¹²² and that the political world must be understood through the prism of conflict. Third, Mouffe emphasized the minimal and mostly cosmetic

differences that exist between the ‘ruling cartel of the established parties’.¹²³ Put otherwise, there is little to fault in the left-populist *diagnosis* of what brought us to the situation we are in.

Nationalists are better populists

Whilst taking inspiration from left-wing populist theories and practice, the IfS authors nonetheless argue that only right-wing populism can truly represent ‘the people’ and build a successful populist force. Crucial here is the distinction made regarding the ontological status of ‘the people’. While theorists such as Laclau and Mouffe, rooted in a post-structuralist paradigm, attach no *a priori* meaning to ‘the people’ and emphasize its discursive construction, the IfS authors favour a more primordial and instinctive conception of ‘the people’ rooted in national and ethnic identity – without this being a naively essentialist position.¹²⁴ Particularly relevant here is that the IfS authors do not shy away from using the term ‘*Volk*’, which, in the German context, is still associated with Nazi Germany and something of a taboo among some progressives, who tend to use other terms such as the more neutral, though less catchy, *Bevölkerung* (population). This corresponds to trends within the *Neue Rechte* more generally, where, as McAdams observes, IfS’ Kubitschek has explicitly embraced the word ‘*Volk*’ to signal a departure from the more flexible and ‘failed’ conceptions of belonging supposedly pushed by Germany’s existing elites.¹²⁵

While such conceptualizations of ‘the people’ in fact contradict the very ontological foundations of Laclau and Mouffe’s position,¹²⁶ for the authors in our corpus, denying ‘the people’ *do* exist prior to any discursive articulation is deemed *the* fundamental weakness of left-wing populisms.¹²⁷ The left may regularly invoke ‘the people’, yet this is deemed somewhat hollow: ‘The permanent reference to a “people” and its democratic sovereignty hardly conceals [the fact] that Mouffe cannot explain what makes up a “people”’.¹²⁸ Questions of identity and national and ethnic belonging are said to reveal the Achilles heel of left populism – and the strength of the right-wing alternative:

A further challenge facing the Laclau and Mouffe inspired left-populism [. . .] is the discussion about who now actually constitutes ‘the people’ or the ‘popular classes’ (*Volksklassen*), with whom one plans to provoke ‘the powers that be’. This is indeed a genuine problem for the left, one which a right populism is hardly confronted with, as there is prevailing clarity on the right [about] who belongs to the people and who doesn’t.¹²⁹

Accordingly, populist strategy is argued to be better suited to the nationalist right. This discussion also has theoretical implications, with Laclau and Mouffe’s constructivist understanding of the people deemed ontologically misguided. Populisms that ignore the ontological ‘truth’ of what constitutes a people, a truth the people themselves are supposedly innately aware of, are destined to fail. Fully aware of this, right-wing populists are deemed the *better* populists exactly because they have a nationalist conception of ‘the people’. They do not treat ‘the people’ as an empty signifier, one that only acquires meaning through the joint opposition of different groups and demands against ‘the elite’. As such, and to make up for this apparent weakness, Kaiser turns instead to de Benoist:

Arguably the decisive difference between the new right pioneer Benoist and the left-oriented populists is ultimately that Benoist assumes a more direct democracy (instead of the current representative-liberal one) requires a priori what Laclau/Mouffe deny: the ‘existence of a relatively homogeneous people’, ‘which is aware of what it actually is’.¹³⁰

Conclusion

There is a broad consensus that the far right successfully *practises* populism, presenting itself as representative of ‘the people’ against ‘the elite’, yet less is known about its own explicit engagement with the populist label and populist strategy. And although populism is debated less than on the left, some right-wing thinkers and activists do consciously reflect on populism. In this article, we focused on the *Institut für Staatspolitik* as a case study of such conscious far-right thinking about populism.

What we find is that the accusation of populism is flipped on its head and directed against ‘the elite’ and its apparent negative attitude towards ‘the people’. The IfS authors are not only comfortable with the accusation of populism but re-signify such attacks as evidence of the far right’s closeness to ‘the people’. Yet discussions about populism are not simply a means to provoke, or an attempt to re-signify what is otherwise a pejorative term. Serious and in-depth discussions tap into current theoretical debates on populism. What stands out is the *Neue Rechte*’s readiness to learn, borrow and apply insights from left-wing theories of populism in line with an older tradition of ‘learning from the other side’ embodied by the *Nouvelle Droite*.

In some respects, the *Neue Rechte* shares an understanding of the ‘populist moment’ with the left. This is evident in the dismissal of ‘anti-populism’ as well as the authors’ serious reflection on the benefits and legitimacy of a populist political strategy. Populism is framed not as a problem but a *reaction* and *solution* to an out-of-touch political establishment increasingly serving its own interests. As on the left, populism is opposed to ‘liberalism’ and ‘globalism’. ‘Liberalism’, however, has a different meaning on the right: it is a critique of individualism and a defence of the nation as an organic community. As for ‘globalism’, while left-wing sounding critiques of the global flow of capital are present, the term is primarily used to criticize the free movement of people and the effect of global capitalism on culture and identity.

It is here we begin to see left and right conceptions of populism take widely diverging paths. When the *Neue Rechte* discusses populism, it is firmly located within far-right discourse. Populism is depicted as a way to defend the interests of forgotten *national* citizens, who are the victims of the globalization and multiculturalism ‘experiment’ forced from above by a globally-operating elite. This elite’s biggest crime is their abandonment of the nation, demonstrating how the populism the IfS celebrates and defends is entangled with an ideology centred on national sovereignty and national identity. Our analysis thus clearly confirms the need to study populism not in isolation, but rather connect the analysis of populist discourses – and discourses about populism – to the broader ideological environment in which they are produced. This is an intuition central to the ‘thin ideology’ definition (how is the thin ideology of populism combined with host ideologies?)¹³¹ as well as to the discourse-theoretical approach (how does the populist political logic bring together different substantive demands).¹³²

Our analysis also shows how the *Neue Rechte* makes use of a favourable discursive environment in which nativist, xenophobic or authoritarian ideas and policies are denounced as ‘populist’. Whilst intended to exclude and delegitimise, the populism label in fact *helps* the IfS to easily blend discourses about populism, nationalism and ethnopluralism, and suggest its nativist and anti-globalist programme indeed reflects the true will of the people.¹³³

While the impact of the *Neue Rechte* cannot be easily measured at the ballot box, the IfS authors clearly develop their thoughts in relation to German (and international) political developments. From their position as intellectuals and activists outside party politics, they urge the AfD towards a more decidedly populist strategy that empowers ‘organic’ and local communities against global elites and markets. Our findings, therefore, confirm the usefulness of moving beyond electoral politics to achieve a more holistic understanding of the far right.¹³⁴

This article has been exploratory, focused on one country and one, though clearly important and influential, far-right think tank. Our brief sketch of some of the most significant far-right voices on populism (see section ‘far-right reflections about populism’) indicates that the IfS is not alone in seriously reflecting on populism. There remains much space for further analysis, and future work on far-right discourse about populism could be deepened and expanded along at least three axes: *historically* (how has far right thinking about populism changed over time?); *geographically* (what role have *Nouvelle Droite* ideas about populism played in the far right internationally? What about the influence of the long-standing US right-wing populist strategy on the European far right?); and *comparatively* (do far right movements across Europe and beyond engage with the populism epithet in a similar manner, if it all? What might explain such differences, if any?).

Our analysis indicates that such work needs to engage with how far-right intellectuals and activists enter into conversation with both *centrist* anti-populism and the populism of parts of *the left* as well as far-right party political actors. As such, this kind of analysis would contribute more broadly to our knowledge of the intricate relations between *different types of far-right actors*: academics, intellectuals, activists, parties and journalists, in turn enhancing our understanding of the discussions taking place *within* the far right, highlighting the flow of ideas and points of contention between these various actors.

Notes

1. E. Laclau, *On populist reason* (London: Verso, 2005); Í. Errejón and C. Mouffe, *Construir pueblo: Hegemonía y radicalización de la democracia* (Barcelona: Icaria, 2015); C. Mouffe, *For a left populism* (London: Verso, 2018).
2. See A. Elmgren, ‘The double-edged sword: the political appropriation of the concept of populism’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 23 (2018), pp. 320–341. A. Jäger, ‘The semantic drift: Images of populism in post-war American historiography and their relevance for (European) political science’, *Constellations*, 24 (2017), pp. 310–23, at pp. 318–319.
3. C. Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); H.-G. Betz, *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe* (Basingstoke; London: Macmillan, 1994).

4. But see for example R. Beiner, 'The Plague of Bannionism', *Critical Review*, 31 (2019), pp. 1–15; M. Millerman, 'The Ethnosociological and Existential Dimensions of Alexander Dugin's Populism', *Telos*, 193 (2020), pp. 95–113; Elmgren, 'The double-edged sword', *op. cit.*, Ref. 2.
5. But see L. Karavasilis, 'Perceptions of 'Populism' and 'Anti-populism' in Greek Public Discourse during the Crisis: The case of the website 'Anti-news'', *Politik*, 20 (2017), pp. 58–70; J. P. Zúquete, 'From left to right and beyond: The defense of populism', in C. de la Torre (Ed.) *Routledge handbook of global populism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), pp. 416–434; T. Frank, *The people, no: A brief history of anti-populism* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2020).
6. H. Kellershohn, 'Das Institut für Staatspolitik und das jungkonservative Hegemonieprojekt', in S. Braun et al. (Eds) *Strategien der extremen Rechten: Hintergründe – Analysen – Antworten* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2016), pp. 439–467; S. Volk, 'Introducing eastern Germany's far-right intellectuals', *EUROPP Blog* (2020), available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2020/02/11/introducing-eastern-germanys-far-right-intellectuals/> (Accessed: 10 December 2021).
7. For an analysis of anti-populist discourse, see for example M. D'Eramo, 'Populism and the new oligarchy', *New Left Review*, 82 (2013), pp. 5–28; Y. Stavrakakis, 'How did "populism" become a pejorative concept? And why is this important today? A genealogy of double hermeneutics', *POPULISMUS Working Papers No. 6* (2017).
8. B. Moffitt, 'The Populism/Anti-Populism Divide in Western Europe', *Democratic Theory*, 5 (2018), pp. 1–16; Zúquete, 'From left to right and beyond', *op. cit.*, Ref. 5, p. 417.
9. C. Rovira Kaltwasser, 'The ambivalence of populism: threat and corrective for democracy', *Democratization*, 19 (2012), pp. 184–208; C. Mudde and C. Rovira Kaltwasser, 'Populism and (liberal) democracy: a framework for analysis', in C. Mudde and C. Rovira Kaltwasser (Eds) *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 1–26.
10. Mudde, *Populist Radical Right*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 3, p. 23; see also C. Mudde and C. Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
11. C. Mudde, 'Populism: An Ideational Approach', in C. Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (Eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 27–47; see also K. A. Hawkins et al. (Eds) *The Ideational Approach to Populism. Concept, Theory, and Analysis* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).
12. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 'Populism and (liberal) democracy', *op. cit.*, Ref. 9; Rovira Kaltwasser, 'The ambivalence of populism', *op. cit.*, Ref. 9.
13. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *ibid.*; Rovira Kaltwasser, *ibid.*; see also Moffitt, 'The Populism', *op. cit.*, Ref. 8, p. 4.
14. For instance, L. Grattan, *Populism's power: Radical grassroots democracy in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); P. Gerbaudo, *The mask and the flag: Populism, citizenism, and global protest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
15. For a left-wing critique of populist strategies see S. Žižek, 'Against the populist temptation', *Critical inquiry*, 32 (2006), pp. 551–574; É. Fassin, *Populisme: le grand ressentiment* (Paris: Éditions Textuel, 2017); for a discussion on the debate about populism on the left see J. Hamburger, 'Can There Be a Left Populism?', *Jacobin* (2018), available at: <https://jacobinmag.com/2018/03/left-populism-mouffe-fassin-france-insoumise/> (Accessed: 6 April 2021).
16. E. Laclau, 'Towards a theory of populism', in E. Laclau (Ed.) *Politics and ideology in Marxist theory* (London: New Left Books, 1977), pp. 143–200; Laclau, *On populist reason*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 1; E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and socialist strategy: towards a radical democratic politics* (London: Verso, 1985); Mouffe, *For a left populism*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 1.
17. Laclau, *On populist reason*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 1; Mouffe, *ibid.*
18. Stavrakakis, 'How did "populism"', *op. cit.*, Ref. 7.

19. Indeed, the former deputy leader of the party, Íñigo Errejón, published a conversation with Mouffe titled, '*Construir Pueblo. Hegemonía y Radicalización de la Democracia*, op. cit., Ref. 1., published in English as 'Podemos: In the Name of the People'.
20. Mouffe, *For a left populism*, op. cit., Ref. 1, p. 64.
21. For the differences between the 'old', unreformed *extreme* right and the 'new', modernised/reformed *radical* right, see P. Ignazi, 'The Re-emergence of the Extreme Right in Europe', *Vienna Institute for Advanced Studies*, Political Science Series 21 (1995); P. Hainsworth, *The extreme right in Western Europe* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 5–23; Rydgren, 'Is extreme right-wing populism contagious? Explaining the emergence of a new party family', *European Journal of Political Research*, 44 (2005), pp. 413–437.
22. M. Minkenberg, 'The West European radical right as a collective actor: modeling the impact of cultural and structural variables on party formation and movement mobilization', *Comparative European Politics*, (2003), pp. 149–70, at pp. 152–153.
23. Mudde, *Populist Radical Right*, op. cit., Ref. 3, pp. 49–50.
24. D. Halikiopoulou et al., 'The civic zeitgeist: Nationalism and liberal values in the European radical right', *Nations and Nationalism*, 19 (2013), pp. 107–127.
25. Mudde, *Populist Radical Right*, op. cit., Ref. 3, p. 31; Hainsworth, *The extreme right*, op. cit., Ref. 21., pp. 19–22.
26. J. P. Zúquete, 'The European extreme-right and Islam: New directions?', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 13 (2008), pp. 321–344; L. Fekete, *A suitable enemy: Racism, migration and Islamophobia in Europe* (London: Pluto Press, 2009); O. Shroufi, 'The Gates of Jerusalem: European revisionism and the populist radical Right', *Race & Class*, 57 (2015), pp. 24–42.
27. Mudde, *Populist Radical Right*, op. cit., Ref. 3; see also H.-G. Betz, *Radical Right-Wing Populism*, op. cit., Ref. 3.
28. Zúquete, 'From left to right and beyond', op. cit., Ref. 5.
29. B. De Cleen et al., 'Populist Politics and the Politics of "Populism": The Radical Right in Western Europe', in P. Ostiguy et al. (Eds) *Populism in Global Perspective: A Performative and Discursive Approach* (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 155–177.
30. P. C. Gattinara, 'The study of the far right and its three E's: why scholarship must go beyond Eurocentrism, Electoralism and Externalism', *French Politics*, 18 (2020), pp. -314–333.
31. J. Göppfarth, 'Rethinking the German nation as German Dasein: intellectuals and Heidegger's philosophy in contemporary German New Right nationalism', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 25 (2020), pp. 248–273, at p. 249.
32. Marine Le Pen cited in E. Beardsley, 'France's Marine Le Pen Contends Populism Is The Future'. *NPR*, 1 June (2017), available at: <https://www.npr.org/2017/01/06/508587559/frances-marine-le-pen-contends-populism-is-the-future?t=1600261001511> (Accessed: 16 September 2020.)
33. A. Gauland, 'Alexander Gauland: Warum muss es Populismus sein?', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 6 October (2018), available at: <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/alexander-gauland-warum-muss-es-populismus-sein-15823206.html> (Accessed: 15 May 2020).
34. Gauland, *ibid.*
35. For a detailed analysis of the appropriation of the term populism by the Finns Party see Elmgren, 'The double-edged sword', op. cit., Ref. 2.
36. T. Soini, *Populismi*, (Kunnallisan kehittämissäätiön Polemiasarjan julkaisu, no. 116, 2020).
37. Elmgren, 'The double-edged sword', op. cit., Ref. 2, at p. 327.
38. Frank, *The people, no*, op. cit., Ref. 5, p. 207.
39. Cited in Frank, *ibid.*, p. 209.
40. E.g. R. A. Viguerie, *The establishment vs. the people: is a new populist revolt on the way?* (Chicago, Ill: Gateway Books, 1984); J. Bell, *Populism and elitism: politics in the age of equality* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1992); see Frank, *The people, no*, op. cit., Ref. 5, pp. 196–222.

41. As cited in Beiner, 'The Plague', *op. cit.*, Ref. 4, p. 303.
42. Zúquete, 'From left to right and beyond', *op. cit.*, Ref. 5, p. 425.
43. E.g. V. Coussedière, *Le retour du peuple. An I* (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2016); P. Vial, 'Vous avez dit populisme?', *Terre & Peuple Magazine*, 68 (2016), p. 14; J. Langella, *Refaire un peuple. Pour un populisme radical* (Paris: La Nouvelle Librairie, 2021).
44. See for example the collection of his work, including the essay 'What Is Populism?', published in 2018 by the American journal *Telos*: A. de Benoist, *Democracy and Populism: The Telos Essays* (Candour, NY: Telos Press Publishing, 2018); on *Telos'* embrace of 'new populism' and its relation to the Nouvelle Droite see T. Bar-On, *Where have all the fascists gone?* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), pp. 150–163.
45. J.-Y. Camus, 'Alain de Benoist and the new Right', in M. Sedgwick (Ed.) *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 73–90, at pp. 73; 84–85.
46. Youtube.com, 'Populism and Proxy Way' (2017), available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kA5a8naNhC8> (Accessed: 5 January 2021).
47. M. Laruelle, 'Alexander Dugin and Eurasianism', in M. Sedgwick (Ed.) *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 155–169, at p. 161.
48. Millerman, 'The Ethnosociological and Existential Dimensions', *op. cit.*, Ref. 4; See for example L. Steinmann, 'The Illiberal Far-Right of Aleksandr Dugin. A conversation', *Reset Dialogues on Civilizations*, 4 December (2018), available at: <https://www.resetdoc.org/story/illiberal-far-right-aleksandr-dugin-conversation/> (accessed: 8 October 2020).
49. IFS, 'Institut – IFS', *Institut für Staatspolitik* (2021), available at: <https://staatspolitik.de/institut/> (Accessed 3 February 2021).
50. This also includes *inter alia* the weekly newspaper *Junge Freiheit* and the publisher *Antaios*, see Kellershohn, 'Das Institut für Staatspolitik', in S. Braun et al. (Eds), *op. cit.*, Ref. 6; see also Volk, 'Introducing eastern', *op. cit.*, Ref. 6.
51. Kellershohn, *ibid.*, p. 440.
52. Göppfarth, 'Rethinking the German nation as German Dasein', *op. cit.*, Ref. 31, p. 250.
53. A. J. McAdams, 'Making the case for "difference": From the Nouvelle droite to the Identitarians and the new vanguardists', in A. J. McAdams and A. Castrillon (Eds), *Contemporary Far-Right Thinkers and the Future of Liberal Democracy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), pp. 85–102, at p. 95.
54. M. Minkenberg, 'The Renewal of the Radical Right: Between Modernity and Anti-modernity', *Government and Opposition*, 35 (2000), pp. 170–88, at 179–80; A. Spektorowski, 'The New Right: Ethno-regionalism, ethno-pluralism and the emergence of a neo-fascist "Third Way"', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 8 (2003), pp. 111–30.
55. A. Pfahl-Traughber, *Der Extremismus der Neuen Rechten: Eine Analyse zu Diskursthemen und Positionen* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2019), p. 13.
56. Kellershohn, 'Das Institut für Staatspolitik', in S. Braun et al. (Eds), *op. cit.*, Ref. 6, p. 440.
57. *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident) is an anti-Islam far right movement. Starting in October 2014, the movement has organized weekly demonstrations in the East German city of Dresden, with crowds of up to 20,000 at its peak.
58. Göppfarth, 'Rethinking the German nation as German Dasein', *op. cit.*, Ref. 31, p. 250.
59. Göppfarth, *ibid.*, p. 250.
60. Kellershohn, 'Das Institut für Staatspolitik', in S. Braun et al. (Eds), *op. cit.*, Ref. 6, p. 452.; McAdams, 'Making the case for "difference"', *op. cit.*, Ref. 53., p. 95.
61. Kellershohn, 'Das Institut für Staatspolitik', in Braun et al. (Eds), *op. cit.*, Ref. 6, pp. 439–67; Göppfarth, 'Rethinking the German nation as German Dasein', *op. cit.*, Ref. 31, pp. 251–252.
62. G. Kubitschek, '»Über den Flügel hinaus« – ein Gespräch mit Björn Höcke', *sezession.de*, 21 March (2020), available at: <https://sezession.de/62309/ueber-den-fluegel-hinaus-ein-gespraech-mit-bjoern-hoecke> (Accessed 14 March 2021).
63. Göppfarth, 'Rethinking the German nation as German Dasein', *op. cit.*, Ref. 31, p. 262; Kellershohn, 'Das Institut für Staatspolitik', in S. Braun et al. (Eds), *op. cit.*, Ref. 6, p. 462.

64. McAdams, 'Making the case for "difference"', *op. cit.*, Ref. 53., p. 99.
65. Kellershohn, 'Das Institut für Staatspolitik', in Braun et al. (Eds), *op. cit.*, Ref. 6, p.453.
66. T. Nociar and J. P. Thomeczek, 'Far right politics in Germany: From fascism to populism?', *EUROPP Blog* (2018), available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2018/01/24/far-right-politics-in-germany-from-fascism-to-populism/> (Accessed 12 December 2021).
67. H. Bubrowski, 'Im Kampf gegen die Brandstifter', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 12 March (2020), available at: <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/verfassungsschutz-zu-afd-hoecke-und-kalbitz-sind-rechtsextremisten-16675924.html> (Accessed 5 January 2021).
68. Sezession, 'Konzept', *Sezession.de* (2021), available at: <https://sezession.de/konzept> (Accessed 6 April 2021).
69. Sezession, *ibid.*
70. N. Carpentier and B. De Cleen, 'Bringing discourse theory into media studies: The applicability of discourse theoretical analysis (DTA) for the study of media practises and discourses', *Journal of language and politics*, 6 (2007), pp. 265–293.
71. Carpentier and De Cleen, *ibid.*, p. 277.
72. A. Coffey and P. Atkinson, *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies* (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1996).
73. K. Charmaz, *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis* (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2006).
74. N. Fairclough, *Analysing discourse: textual analysis for social research* (London: Routledge, 2003); M. Reisigl and R. Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Anti-Semitism* (London: Routledge, 2001).
75. Fairclough, *ibid.*, p. 129, italics added.
76. E.g. Laclau, *On populist reason*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 1; J.-W. Müller, *What is populism?* (London: Penguin UK, 2017); Y. Mounk, *Der Zerfall der Demokratie: wie der Populismus den Rechtsstaat bedroht* (München: Droemer, 2018); Mouffe, *For a left populism*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 1.
77. E.g. M. Hoschützky, 'Der Populismus – Eine postmoderne Rechte?', *Sezession*, 3 (2003), pp. 30–35.
78. IfS, 'Die Stunde des Populismus', *Wissenschaftliche Reihe* (Schnellroda: Institut für Staatspolitik, 2017), p. 4.
79. Müller, *What is populism?*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 76.
80. IfS, 'Die Stunde des Populismus', *op. cit.*, Ref. 78., p. 7.
81. M. Lichtmesz, 'Deren Experiment' (Book review), *Sezession*, 85 (2018), p. 64 .
82. A. de Benoist, 'Populismus', *Junge Freiheit*, 18 February (2000).
83. A. de Benoist, *Le moment populiste: droite-gauche, c'est fini!: essai* (Paris: Pierre-Guillaume de Roux, 2017).
84. A. de Benoist and B. Kaiser, 'Kulturrevolution und Populismus – eine Bilanz', *Sezession* (2020), pp. 27–31.
85. C. Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York, NY; London: Norton, 1995).
86. D. Goodhart, *The road to somewhere: The populist revolt and the future of politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
87. Laclau, 'Towards a theory of populism', in E. Laclau (Ed.), *op. cit.*, Ref. 16.
88. IfS, 'Die Stunde des Populismus', *op. cit.*, Ref. 78.
89. de Benoist, *Le moment populiste*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 83.; Mouffe, *For a left populism*, *op. cit.*, Ref. 1.
90. Hoschützky, 'Der Populismus', *op. cit.*, Ref. 77, pp. 31–32. This and all the following translations from German into English have been carried out by the authors.
91. B. Kaiser, 'Thema der Stunde, Buch von gestern' (Book Review), *Sezession* 80 (2017), p. 80.
92. Kaiser, *ibid.*
93. Hoschützky, 'Der Populismus', *op. cit.*, Ref. 77, p. 32.
94. Hoschützky, *ibid.*, p. 33.
95. A. Gauland, 'Populismus und Demokratie', *Sezession* 88 (2019), pp. 14–20, at p. 18.
96. Gauland, *ibid.*
97. Lichtmesz, 'Deren Experiment', *op. cit.*, Ref. 81., p. 64.

98. de Benoist and Kaiser, 'Kulturrevolution und Populismus', *op. cit.*, Ref. 84.
99. B. Kaiser, 'Die Lücke, das Volk, die Linke', *Sezession*, 85 (2018), pp. 10–15, at p. 12, italics added.
100. Gauland, 'Populismus und Demokratie', *op. cit.*, Ref. 95, p. 20.
101. Gauland, *ibid.*, p. 18.
102. Gauland, *ibid.*, p. 18.
103. Lichtmesz, 'Deren Experiment', *op. cit.*, Ref. 81.
104. de Benoist and Kaiser, 'Kulturrevolution und Populismus', *op. cit.*, Ref. 84, p. 31.
105. de Benoist and Kaiser, *ibid.*, p. 28.
106. Hoschützky, 'Der Populismus', *op. cit.*, Ref. 77.
107. IfS, 'Die Stunde des Populismus', *op. cit.*, Ref. 78.
108. IfS, *ibid.*, p. 22.
109. de Benoist and Kaiser, 'Kulturrevolution und Populismus', *op. cit.*, Ref. 84, p. 31.
110. IfS, 'Die Stunde des Populismus', *op. cit.*, Ref. 78, pp. 24–25.
111. B. Kaiser, 'Zweierlei Deutschland, zweierlei AfD?', *Sezession* 90 (2019), pp. 25–29, at p. 26.
112. Kaiser, *ibid.*, p. 29.
113. Kaiser, *ibid.*, p. 29.
114. A. de Benoist, 'Pour un "Gramscisme de Droite"', *Eléments*, 20 (1977), p. 7.
115. B. Kaiser, 'Querfrontpotential? Populismus bei Mouffe und Laclau', *Sezession*, 79 (2017), pp. 26–30, at pp. 27–28.
116. IfS, 'Die Stunde des Populismus', *op. cit.*, Ref. 78, p. 13.
117. B. Kaiser, 'Linker Realismus?' (Book Review), *Sezession*, 86 (2018), p. 64.
118. The 'Querdenken' (lateral-thinking) initiative has been central to many of the demonstrations against the German government's COVID-19 policies. The political make-up of the demonstrations has been difficult to pin down, attracting an eclectic mix of sceptical members of the public as well as anti-vaccine campaigners, hippies, conspiracy theorists and the extreme right.
119. Kellershohn, 'Das Institut für Staatspolitik', in S. Braun et al. (Eds), *op. cit.*, Ref. 6, p. 460.
120. Kaiser, 'Querfrontpotential? Populismus', *op. cit.*, Ref. 115, pp. 27–28; IfS, 'Die Stunde des Populismus', *op. cit.*, Ref. 78, p. 12.
121. Kaiser, *ibid.*, p. 27.
122. Kaiser, *ibid.*, p. 28.
123. Kaiser, *ibid.*, p. 28.
124. See Göppfarth, 'Rethinking the German nation as German Dasein', *op. cit.*, Ref. 31, p. 263.
125. McAdams, 'Making the case for "difference"', *op. cit.*, Ref. 53, pp. 96–97. According to McAdams, Kubitschek vehemently rejects the supposed efforts of Germany's postwar leaders to downgrade and denigrate German identity and empty it of any uniqueness.
126. This links up with Stavrakakis et al.'s argument that the far right does not fully function according to the populist logic as conceptualized by Laclau. 'The people' is either secondary to its discourse or the notion of 'the people' ultimately refers back to essentialist notions of 'race' or 'nation', preventing the populist construction of a 'people' that includes different groups and demands in opposition to 'the elite', see Y. Stavrakakis et al., 'Extreme right-wing populism in Europe: revisiting a reified association', *Critical Discourse Studies*, 14 (2017), pp. 420–439.
127. Kaiser, 'Die Lücke', *op. cit.*, Ref. 99.
128. Kaiser, 'Linker Realismus?', *op. cit.*, Ref. 117.
129. Kaiser, *ibid.*, p. 30.
130. Kaiser, 'Querfrontpotential? Populismus', *op. cit.*, Ref. 115, p. 28.
131. M. Rooduijn, 'State of the field: How to study populism and adjacent topics? A plea for both more and less focus', *European Journal of Political Research*, 58 (2019), pp. 362–372.
132. B. De Cleen et al., 'Critical research on populism: Nine rules of engagement', *Organization*, 25(2018), pp. 649–661.
133. De Cleen et al., 'Populist Politics and the Politics of "Populism"', in P. Ostiguy et al. (Eds), *op. cit.*, Ref. 29.

134. Gattinara, ‘The study of the far right and its three E’s’, *op. cit.*, Ref. 30; K. Brown et al., ‘The far right, the mainstream and mainstreaming: towards a heuristic framework’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, ahead-of-print (2021), pp. 1–18.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Appendix

Table 1. IfS publications on populism.

Author	Publication	Title of article or publication	Year	Number of pages
Martin Hoschützky	Sezession	Der Populismus – Eine postmoderne Rechte? (Populism – A postmodern right?)	2003 (issue 3)	6
Ellen Kositzka	Sezession	Digitaler Populismus (Digital Populism: Review of Susanne Gaschke’s Klick. Strategien gegen die digitale Verdummung)	2009 (issue 30)	1
Randolf Jeß	Sezession	Politischer Populismus (Political Populism: Review of Michael Hüther/Thomas Straushaar’s Die Gefühle Ungerechtigkeit – Warum wir Ungleichheit aushalten müssen, wenn wir Freiheit wollen)	2009 (issue 30)	1
Benedikt Kaiser	Sezession	Querfrontpotential? Populismus bei Laclau und Mouffe (Cross-front potential: Populism by Laclau and Mouffe)	2017 (issue 79)	5
Benedikt Kaiser	Sezession	Thema der Stunde, Buch von gestern (Topic of the hour, book of yesterday: Review of David Van Reybrouck’s Für einen anderen Populismus. Ein Plädoyer)	2017 (issue 80)	1
Benedikt Kaiser	Sezession	Die Lücke, das Volk, die Linke (The Gap, the People, the Left)	2018 (issue 85)	6
Martin Lichtmesz	Sezession	Deren Experiment (Their Experiment: Review of Yascha Mounk’s Der Zerfall der Demokratie)	2018 (issue 85)	1
Benedikt Kaiser	Sezession	Linker Realismus? (Reviews of Peter Singer’s Linke, Hört die Signale and Chantal Mouffe’s Für einen linken Populismus)	2018 (issue 86)	1
Alexander Gauland	Sezession	Populismus und Demokratie (Populism and Democracy)	2019 (issue 88)	7
Benedikt Kaiser	Sezession	Zweierlei Deutschland, zweierlei AfD? (Two types of Germany, two types of AfD?)	2019 (issue 90)	5
Alain de Benoist in conversation with Benedikt Kaiser	Sezession	Kulturrevolution und Populismus – eine Bilanz (Cultural Revolution and Populism – a Balance)	2020 (issue 96)	5
Institut für Staatspolitik	Wissenschaftliche Reihe	Die Stunde des Populismus: Das Volk, die Elite und die Krise der Repräsentation (The Hour of Populism: The People, the Elite and the Crisis of Representation)	2017	42