The Janus Face of Democracy and Populist Tendencies

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ABSTRACT	ARTICLE HISTORY	
Democracy and populism are two visions of socio-political life, drawing on the idea of the people and the desire to involve them in decision-making processes in a way that leads to their real subjectivity. They are often combined or contrasted in political debates. Both concepts strive to achieve positive results in terms of emphasizing the role of ordinary citizens, but they use different tools. The relationship between democracy and populism is complex and depends on the context and the way in which populism is implemented in practice. The aim of the article is to point out the complex relationship between the concepts, clearly emphasizing that populist tendencies are not clearly the result of the actions of desperate groups from the margins of social life. The basis for the birth of populism is, to a large extent, democracy itself, which functions in a permanent state of stress and tension, implying populist behavior.	
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1. Introduction.

The essence of the relationship between populism and democracy is one of the most frequently explored research issues concerning contemporary political phenomena (Canovan, 1999; Akkerman et al., 2014; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008). The significance and importance of the topic arise from the observation of political processes and changes that are taking place in the socio-political space, which is increasingly filled with politics based on popularity, spreading catchy slogans, and manipulation. The first observations already indicate the negative potential of the phenomenon of populism. However, simplifying initial assumptions could lead to false, apparent, or even falsified conclusions from the discourse. The relationship between populism and democracy, which will be analyzed in the article, is much more complex than the most frequently exposed destructive and crisis-generating impact of populist politics on democratic governance. Penetrating this ambivalent relationship requires transcending stereotypical thinking about democracy and the mechanisms of shaping social attitudes towards socio-political phenomena.

The article aims to explain the phenomenon of interdependence that exists between democratic governance and the occurrence of populism. In the process of explanation, it will be essential to point out the essence of democracy as a principle of governance that enables participation in the mechanisms of exercising power and the phenomenon of populism, which penetrates these mechanisms more and more intensively, changing the nature of democratic rules. Democracy is perceived as an internally complex idea, the practical implementation of which does not always reflect the theoretical assumptions. The phrase *Janus's face,* even if translated as hypocrisy, duplicity, or ambiguity, is intended to emphasize the internal complexity of the idea of democracy but is not an attempt to discredit the democratic vision of socio-political life.

2. Research Assumptions.

The methodology of research on populism is not uniform. The research approach we use will depend on the definition of our research interest and what we see in populism: the formula of new parties (radical right), a manifestation of direct democracy, a radical response of a dissatisfied people, a different form of rhetoric or perhaps a style of exercising power

characteristic of a given region of the world. Each of the options mentioned suggests the use of different perspectives. Therefore, we can rely on theories of party research, refer to the discourse on civic participation, point to theories of social movements, research on language as a form of communication, and use comparative analysis pointing to various populist geographical traditions. The determinant of adopting an approach is the research goal we want to achieve. The presented approach is a compilation of perspectives from the point of view of civic participation and the phenomenon of social movement. The research procedure will be based on analysis, comparison, generalization, and abstraction.

The article does not intend to analyze a wide range of empirical cases of various populisms or in-depth reflection on the political phenomenon of democracy. There has already been a rich literature on populist parties and movements emerging in various social, cultural, and political realities and conditions since the 19th century (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Goodwin & Milazzo, 2017, pp. 450-464; Méndez & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, pp. 286-314). In turn, research on democracy as an idea and political system has one of the richest traditions in political science (Dahl, 1971; Tilly, 2007).

This article aims to examine a small section of the space where these phenomena intersect. The accepted assumption is that although populism contains destabilizing tendencies for democracy, its nature does not differ much from the latter's essence. Democracy combines various values and historical experiences, meaning its internal environment is subject to complex processes that sometimes lead to contradictory phenomena. Among them is the phenomenon of populism.

The foundation of this assumption is that one of the problems of a complex democratic nature is the issue of citizen representation and participation. The promise of democracy is commonly associated with the ability to influence decisions and have a broad social presence in management processes. However, the realities of contemporary public space do not allow this declaration to come true. A representation mechanism is necessary, thanks to which citizens' participation in socio-political life can adopt a constructive and logical framework. However, here lies the source of the problem, the essence of which is the danger of perverting this mechanism, primarily by reducing civic participation at the expense of shifting influence to

elected representatives. This may arouse social dissatisfaction and disappointment with the democratic rules of the game in politics. We are, therefore, dealing with a situation in which democracy turns away from its original assumptions and reduces itself to considering a select few voices.

Moreover, here, there is a gap that populism fills. How does this happen, and does it mean populism is an alternative to democracy? How is democracy changing under the influence of populism? Furthermore, finally, is democracy a project with two faces, one of which is the universally supported idea of participation and co-governance, and the other is the face of a system that must constantly defend itself against losing its greatest virtue, which is effective participation? Moreover, does populism always accompany democracy like a shadow, appearing whenever the rays of light, which symbolize a properly implemented representation mechanism, stop reaching it? These doubts and many others can be asked when seeking answers to the relationship between democracy and populism.

The hypothesis is that although democracy and populism have points of contact when considering the issue of strengthening and highlighting the role of the people in public life, the perspective on the processes and mechanisms by which this result can be achieved is different. Both democracy and populism are guided by the idea of people's empowerment and national sovereignty and emphasize the importance of debate and public discourse as well as the role of citizen participation (Dryzek, 2002; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). However, populism's use of tools such as manipulation, stereotypes, or nationalist narrative often results in authoritarianism, i.e., a turning away from democratic values and rules of life. Meanwhile, democracy pursues these goals based on liberal principles, such as respecting minority rights, protection political, social, and cultural pluralism, and the rule of law, which protects against the ending as mentioned above but does not protect against tensions and stresses (Ginsburg & Huq, 2018; Piketty, 2014; Stiglitz, 2012; Sunstein, 2017)[1].

3. Democracy in the Mechanism of Representation.

Modern democracy is implemented through a representative mechanism to ensure citizens' participation in political processes and control over power. The history of modern democracy is the history of improving and expanding the representation mechanism and including more

comprehensive groups in the circle of co-decision-makers. It is the history of such processes and phenomena as the revolutions of the 18th century in America and France, the electoral reforms of the 19th century, including granting voting rights to women, the fight for racial equality, the transformation after the fall of communism after 1989, the enlargement of the EU and the Internet revolution (Branch, 1989; Grabbe, 2006; Linz & Stepan, 1996; Wood, 1991). Despite everything, it still needs to be a perfect mechanism. Due to various conditions accompanying democratic governments, public feelings about the method of participation and its influence are not always consistent with what is within the imagination of those in power. According to Andrzej Waśkiewicz, representation does not support democratization processes at all. It is, at best, an inevitable evil if democracies are treated very rigorously (Waśkiewicz, 2012, p. 13).

The functioning of democracy in the representation mechanism is therefore associated with various challenges, such as a low level of electoral involvement or threats to the independence of democratic institutions. Above all, the problem lies in the issue of a broader or narrower representation formula.

It would seem that democracy allowing for a wide range of participation is the best solution to the dilemma mentioned above. However, the situation is slightly different when one looks at this issue from the point of view of the efficiency and effectiveness of decision-making. As the experience of various decision-making bodies shows, the greater the number of decision-makers and communities with whom decisions need to be agreed, the longer and more complicated the path to the final effect (Lupia & Matsusaka, 2004, pp. 463-482).

Is democracy, based on limited representation, a better option? We will then be dealing with an elite democracy, the advantage of which will certainly be a smaller decision-making group and greater coherence of the decision-making environment (Gilens & Page, 2014, pp. 564-581). But what about democratic inclusiveness? Its central aspect emphasizes equality in access to political institutions and procedures (Norris, 2011, pp. 15-33)?

Therefore, the problem of representation seems unsolvable and may generate difficulties. Groups that will feel excluded from decision-making processes, and this will be a permanent situation, will try to vent their frustration and aspirations in ways that, while referring to

democracy, may cause its negative transformations (Król, 2020). As a result, there may be restrictions in access to information, threats to political pluralism, lack of representativeness or restrictions on minority rights (Norris, 2002). On the other hand, direct democracy tools can lead to many undesirable phenomena, such as the lack of effective correction mechanisms (Cronin, 1989), weak or insufficient interest in participating in public life and the resulting insufficient representation (Franklin, 2004; Warren, 2002), costs and delays in the decision-making process, or manipulation and disinformation (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

In 2020, Prof. Marcin Król commented that the principle of representation functions terribly, but on the other hand, a new democracy cannot do without the principle of representation. This would mean we are creating some utopia and the need to change the functioning of representation radically.

What can you suggest? There are probably many solutions, in theoretical terms, ranging from changes in the way elections are conducted, including the division into constituencies and counting votes, through the way of conducting campaigns and encouraging participation in voting, to the use of direct decision-making mechanisms in a wide range. However, when we look realistically at the conditions of a given political system and a specific democracy, the matter no longer seems so clear-cut, and the possibilities to be used turn out to be politically or culturally limited by many factors. The complexity of factors influencing the formation of a specific model of democracy makes it difficult to develop tools that could be used on a wide scale and treated as a panacea for all the ills of the democratic representation mechanism. Democracy depends on socio-cultural conditions, among which are important, among others, the tradition of an open and tolerant society, the level of education and attitude to religion, and political variables such as the durability of political institutions, the role of political parties, their structure and functioning, the degree of independence of the media (Powell, 2004), the attitude to the phenomenon of corruption (Inglehart, 1997). These conditions are compounded by the phenomenon of globalization, which blurs the boundaries between the responsibility of individual actors for the decisions they make and thus weakens one of the most critical aspects of the democratic system. Globalization leads to the belief that the state's borders are too tight and the state's territory too small to solve contemporary problems. The modern state no longer

decides on many issues on its own, which is due to the development of transnational relations (Wierzchowska, 2013, p. 40). As Grzegorz Rydlewski notes: "Globalization has led to a qualitative breakthrough: the emergence of global players in governance with an apparent asymmetry between power and responsibility (Rydlewski, 2009). "For voters, this may mean blurring the differences between national and global players. As Elżbieta Szulc-Wałecka recalls, the contemporary governance model is subject to changes, including a growing reluctance to participate in elections and a decline in trust in public institutions, elites, and parties. A citizen is no longer just a client or consumer but wants to co-govern more often without the unnecessary intermediation of old party structures (Szulc-Walecka, 2021, p. 88). Moreover, there is room for populism and the possibility of using populist tools to gain supporters, which, if successful, leads to the phenomenon called tyranny of the majority. The tyranny of the majority leads to the most active part of society, considered the majority, imposing its will on the people. Most often, this means disregarding the needs of minorities by issuing acts of authority or using a system of social self-censorship that favors the spread of manipulation (Szczepański, 2011). In populism, the tyranny of the majority means restrictions on the rights and freedoms of minorities and the use of policies that favor one group at the expense of others. This is a practical way of functioning in a democratic system without appropriate safeguards and breaks. Some people compare the concept of totalitarian democracy with the tyranny of the majority and point out that totalitarian democracy is a regime that accompanies the emergence of a form of government, which is the tyranny of the majority, which is the result of the defective functioning of the democratic system. John Stuart Mill already noticed this type of danger associated with democracy and emphasized that there are two types of threats to democracy: those from the authorities and those from public opinion. The first is related to the problem of selecting the majority exercising power and the legitimacy of the representative government to exercise it. The best solution to this problem is proportional elections, which can not only ensure the representation of both the majority and minority of society but also, importantly, break the connections of political and financial elites. However, the great liberals forgot about another issue: low voter turnout, which falsifies the election results when selecting the majority.

In the context of populism, the tyranny of the majority means restrictions on the rights and freedoms of minorities and the use of policies that favor one group at the expense of others.

It is important to remember that tyranny is always the mortal enemy of democracy. Nevertheless, the tyrant-usurper does not always have to be an individual. There may be several of them here. Finally, it may even be a statistical majority.

A good democracy is a democracy that takes into account the needs of all communities, respects minorities, and is based on a stable and fair mechanism for selecting representatives. What is essential here are both procedures and legal solutions (e.g., regarding the method of converting electoral votes into mandates), as well as the political culture of citizens, prone to respect for diversity and activity for the benefit of all. This does not change the fact that the fundamental virtue of democracy, which is placing power in the hands of the people, is also a source of problems and tensions. It is impossible to construct and implement an ideal representation mechanism that takes into account the needs of everyone and, at the same time, fits into the realities of the modern world subject to globalization processes.

4. Populist Vision of the World in Terms of the Mechanism of Representation.

Populism, as previously mentioned, accompanies democracy, waiting for the circumstances in which it may arise. These circumstances always indicate difficulties, weaknesses, or challenges to the democratic order.

Populism is a phenomenon that is very difficult to define. It has many versions and is primarily a reflection of time and place. As Anton Pelinka wrote, populism is related to the phenomenon of social hierarchy and resides in the mind of every researcher (Pelinka, 2010, p. 18). For some, populism is politics; for others, it is the pathology of politics. The phrase "populism" means virtually nothing today; it all depends on what we consider populist in the realities of a specific country.

This is a general category relating to several political phenomena. The constitutive feature of populism "in general" is that it is a separate form of political rhetoric that finds its effectiveness and legitimacy in "the people", viewing the ruling elites as corrupt and emphasizing that the implementation of the people's political goals can be more effective based on government-people relations rather than through the mediation of political institutions.

Peter Wiles claims that populism cannot be any political doctrine but, at most, a "syndrome". Populism is nothing more than "a belief system or movement based on this central premise: virtue belongs to the ordinary people, the overwhelming majority, and their collective tradition (Wiles, 1969, p. 171). Populism is instead an ideological thought construct, eclectic in its tendency to combine elements of different ideologies in a way that suits a given situation (Szacki, 2006, pp. 15-18). Populism should be related to political actions or discourse rather than a regime or political ideology. It is a political style that adapts to various ideological and political frameworks.

When searching for the essence of populism, one should avoid perceiving it solely through the prism of irrational aspirations of frustrated and uninfluenced circles following a charismatic leader. This is only a fragment of the populist reality. As Eric points out, Laclau's finding of rationality in populism allows us to replace the question "What is populism the question" with the question "To what social and ideological reality does the category of populism apply (Laclau, 2005, p. 19)? " Removing the unexplained and elusive peculiarity from the studied Odum phenomenon opens up explanatory possibilities devoid of easy reductionism and ultimately leads to the discovery of significant factors that change the functioning of the democratic political system. This approach also allows for more profound answers about the systemic determinants of the emergence and spread of populist tendencies. If we begin to perceive them as behaviors resulting from certain legitimate motives embedded in the system and not just irrational reactions to the behavior of elites, then the perspective in which we read populism changes. The proposed approach perceives populism as a phenomenon resulting from the functioning of the democratic system or, more precisely, the manifestation of the weaknesses of this system. This is an inherent feature of the democratic system, which, while making many promises, is often unable to keep them.

Populism results from a paradox at the heart of democracy. The impulse for universal inclusion is inherent in the democratic project. At the same time, however, exclusion is a constitutive element of inclusion, which makes it inevitable. This is because, with every attempt to expand the scope of integration, forms of exclusion appear. No matter how hard a democracy tries to deepen its inclusiveness, new frontiers emerge.

Another democratic paradox leading to the awakening of populist tendencies is the inclination towards self-government in a democracy and a certain level of reluctance on the part of citizens to be governed, which populists change into reluctance towards the ruling elite and a certain level of conflict resulting from the need to transform group interests into the common good. As Marczewska-Rytko points out: "The idealization of a people, nation or society goes hand in hand with the depreciation of elites. Anti-elitism and anti-intellectualism consist of the belief that elites are, in fact, carriers of values that have little in common with the values professed by the people (conflict of values). Populism refers not to the intellect or knowledge but to concepts such as justice, tradition, feeling, or faith. For this reason, the world of intellect appears as a world utterly alien to the general public (Marczewska-Rytko, 2011). Populism, understood as an outrage against elite rule, is closely related to the basic principles and values on which democracy is based, particularly its egalitarian commitments. For this reason, populism can be read as a symptom of democratic neglect towards groups that, for some reason, are omitted or not taken into account in aggregating interests. Populist outbursts are an external expression of frustration, irritation, or anger due to experienced exclusion. However, populism is never just about moral offense. This is not simple frustration with systemic injustice. This is just a pretext to take control of the conflictual relationship between rival groups and an opportunity to assign blame for such violations to specific actors and actions. The populist then opens the door to deep social polarization and shapes a vision of politics as a zero-sum game in which the gains of one side are necessarily the losses of the other.

5. Concluding Remarks: Democracy and Populism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?

The comments made in the earlier part of the study indicate that populism and democracy are closely related. They are united by the idea of people's empowerment, perceived as the central assumption of the social order, which should be based on the principle of power exercised by citizens. However, this is where the similarities end and the differences begin. Their essence is related to the principle of representation. Populism rejects the legitimacy of delegation of power, as well as most democratic institutions and procedures, based on the phenomenon of indirect democracy. As populists believe, power comes from the people's will

but simultaneously limits them by their rule. Hence, populists strongly support the delegation theory of political representation, according to which elites should do what people tell them to do. Its fundamental principles are the assumption that citizens know their interests, can define their preferences, and justify them. People know how to promote their interests and elect representatives to implement them. At the same time, individuals can competently assess the actions of politicians from the point of view of their interests (Manin, 1997; Rehfeld, 2006).

Populism is the reverse of representative democracy; it comes from within and is fed by its mechanisms. This view shows populism primarily as a phenomenon harmful to democracy, correcting its most valuable representative mechanisms. The desire to increase citizens' influence on the governance process and increase self-government are not negative phenomena. However, in the populist version, they become manipulated and even imposed needs, which turn into a threat to the idea of democracy.

However, it is possible to extract some positive or promising features from this undesirable tendency. Populism is a signal that warns about representative systems' flaws, limitations, and weaknesses. Democratic politics is not understandable to most people whose emancipation it is intended to serve. Despite its openness and attempt to involve citizens in active participation in politics, it is a highly opaque form. One could even say that the paradox of democracy is that empowerment leads to opacity. People get lost in the maze of opportunities to influence decisions. When they do not see the effects of their actions, they react suspiciously or even hostilely to signals from the system. Modern man is lost in the mechanism of a democratic state, sometimes overwhelmed by bureaucracy and procedures that are often incomprehensible to him. He needs a guide who will guide his choices in an understanding way. Populist leaders fulfill this role very well, creating their political image based on communication mechanisms with an intensely emotional tone.

If we look for the causes of populism, taking into account the imperfections of democracy, we can assume that they lie in the following conditions:

– Decline in political participation;

– Growing voter absenteeism;

– Electoral fluidity;

– Decreasing the importance of political parties;

– Increased political anomie;

– Democratic practices: legalism, influence of conciliation procedures and pressure groups, making bargains and compromises

Through their proposals, populists also point to their vision of democratic governance. They seek to increase the role of vertical connections between representative authorities and voters, for example, by resorting to direct democracy. That is why populists propose the introduction of tied mandates, referenda, plebiscites, and the possibility of online voting. They support strengthening the role of the general referendum and majority rule, which would abolish autocracy. In this way, a new formula of democracy called populist democracy is born (Mény & Surel, 2002; Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). However, it should not be perceived as a complete, developed concept but rather as an observed tendency to change in democracy under the influence of populist ideas. There is then a call to reject the traditional institutions of representative democracy and to give full power to a leader capable of seducing the people, to a leader who is identified with the people.

Populism can be read as an expression of unfulfilled promises of democracy, which, as a formula for responding to human needs and expectations in the political, social, and cultural spheres, cannot always keep these promises.

Populism depends on democracy; it is its shadow, which is more or less visible depending on the circumstances in which the rule of the democratic game is fulfilled. Democracy is a landmark of analysis for populism. Both phenomena are inseparable, but the emergence of populist ideas takes place when democracy demands more excellent care and interest, especially from those in power.

Conflicts of Interest:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The tensions mentioned above result from many conditions in which democracy operates and include political and cultural diversity, social inequalities, political polarization, economic crises, information manipulation, challenges to the rule of law related to the departure from or too much attachment to liberal values.