

# **A Cultural-Psychological Approach to Populism Theoretical Grounding of a Contested Phenomenon**

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## **Abstract**

Populism, mostly in its far-right drifts, sets as a compelling challenge for western democracies. Academic scholarships strive to tackle its disruptive effects, encountering two main drawbacks: to achieve a shared definition; to understand how the global social, political and financial conditions translate into support for populist parties. We argue that these shortcomings arise if “populism” is assumed as an objective, “natural” phenomenon, instead of the result of a theoretical modelling. In response, we advocate for an epistemological inversion of the theory-phenomenon relation, building on a constructivist standpoint. In this view, a psychological theory of the social bond is adopted to make sense of the social phenomena encompassed by the “populism” label. The goal is twofold: to disentangle populism from being a reified concept towards a theoretically constructed one and to question the theory in its capability to make sense of it.

**Keywords:** populism, cultural psychology, psychoanalysis, reification, theoretical modelling