

## Populism, Identity Politics, and the Challenge of Counter Anti-Black and Anti-Muslim Populism: A Comprehensive Analysis

Done, Catalin-Gabriel

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version  
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Done, C.-G. (2023). Populism, Identity Politics, and the Challenge of Counter Anti-Black and Anti-Muslim Populism: A Comprehensive Analysis. *Perspective Politice*, 16(1-2), 32-49. <https://doi.org/10.25019/perspol/23.16.3>

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-NC-SA Lizenz (Namensnennung-Nicht-kommerziell-Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/deed.de>

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY-NC-SA Licence (Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike). For more information see:  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0>

## How to cite this paper:

Done, C.-G. (2023). Populism, Identity Politics, and the Challenge of Counter Anti-Black and Anti-Muslim Populism: A Comprehensive Analysis. *Perspective Politice*. Vol. XVI (1-2), 32-49.

<https://doi.org/10.25019/perspol/23.16.3>

Received: August 2023

Accepted: September 2023

Published: December 2023

**Copyright:** © 2023 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license.

## Article

# Populism, Identity Politics, and the Challenge of Counter Anti-Black and Anti-Muslim Populism: A Comprehensive Analysis

**Abstract:** *This paper presents an in-depth investigation into the intricate dynamics between socio-political crises, Black and Muslim social groups, and the escalating support for Populism and populist movements within the context of contemporary France. Our study seeks to unveil the direct and distinct correlations that exist between these minority communities and the surge of Populism while empirically scrutinising the underlying relationships between socioeconomic, cultural, and political integration and the rise of populist sentiments.*

*The research delves into the complex landscape of Populism, encompassing its various manifestations and identifying how socio-political crises provide fertile ground for populist appeals. By exploring the intricate interplay between these elements, our study contributes to an enhanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of Populism within diverse social contexts. The paper's theoretical framework is rooted in the theory of Populism, the principles of intersectionality and the analysis of the relationship between world-feelings and populist support. Methodologically, we take a comprehensive approach based on quantitative and data collection methods. Thus, we empirically examine the relationship between socioeconomic, cultural, and political integration and whether the link between these factors is related to Populism and political radicalisation.*

## Cătălin-Gabriel DONE

University of Naples Federico II,  
Department of Political Sciences, PhD  
Candidate, Naples, Italy; 0000-0002-7731-3828;  
Vice-president of ESGA Romania  
[catalin-gabriel.done@unina.it](mailto:catalin-gabriel.done@unina.it) /  
[catalin.done.15@politice.ro](mailto:catalin.done.15@politice.ro)

*The results reveal intricate correlations between integration and the prevalence of populist sentiments, highlighting the role of socioeconomic and cultural factors and political engagement in shaping these dynamics. This article not only contributes to the academic understanding of populism and minority politics but also offers practical implications.*

**Keywords:** *France; ideology; Populism; protest; social integration; social minority*

## 1. Introduction

The intricate relationship between ideology, social status, and their impact on political behaviour has long been a subject of academic inquiry. This research embarks on a compelling exploration grounded in the premise that the asymmetric interplay between ideology and social status can serve as a catalyst for intolerance and political radicalism. In a world marked by shifting political landscapes, this study seeks to elucidate how individuals' personal ideological perspectives undergo substantial transformations under specific circumstances. We put forward the theoretical foundation of an ideological conflict hypothesis to offer a comprehensive perspective on ideological and social intolerance and underscore its response to contemporary social crises. This hypothesis posits that political radicalisation often finds fertile ground within the domain of mass Populism.

The focus of this analysis extends to the context of the ongoing social crisis in France and, more specifically, examines the potential influence of Black and Muslim Populism on the nation's social and political fabric. France, a nation historically celebrated for its commitment to liberty, equality, and fraternity, has witnessed a series of complex societal challenges in recent years. These challenges include but are not limited to socioeconomic disparities, rising political polarisation, and cultural and religious identity issues. Against this backdrop, we aim to dissect the role of Black and Muslim Populism in reshaping the structure of French society and politics.

In the subsequent sections, we undertake a comprehensive exploration of these themes. We begin by laying the theoretical foundation with the conflict hypothesis. We then delve into the intricacies of Populism, its historical context in France, and its multifaceted impact on contemporary politics. Following this, we provide a detailed overview of the ongoing social crisis in France, examining the factors contributing to this crisis and its implications for society today.

We will focus on the emergence of Black and Muslim Populism within the French political landscape, delving into the ideologies and goals associated with these movements. We explore how these movements interact with and potentially reshape public opinion, leading to transformations in individual ideological perspectives.

As we proceed, our investigation extends to the consequences of Black and Muslim Populism on social cohesion in France. We assess their impact on community relations, integration efforts, and perceptions of diversity. Simultaneously, we examine the influence of these movements on the political landscape, including the rise of new movements and parties and the reconfiguration of traditional political blocs.

The French socio-political context, particularly the rise of social contestation and the idealisation of populist protest among Blacks and Muslims, can be viewed as a rhetorical battleground. In recent years, the different social movements and political coalitions, particularly those representing the right and left wings, have directed their energies towards attacking their adversaries rather than articulating constructive programs. Within this context, rhetoric, and more specifically, the use of emotive language, has assumed a pivotal role.

Much like the Italian elections of 2022, Austrian federal elections of 2019, and Danish general elections in 2022, where emotive words played a crucial role in shaping public discourse, the French social and political landscape has witnessed a similar trend. Rather than presenting comprehensive, long-term plans, political and social actors in France have often resorted to the crystallisation of negative attributes and characteristics of their opponents. Social media, too, has contributed to this war of epithets by quoting emotive characterisations, thereby influencing public opinion.

Within this framework, it is essential to delve into the argumentative strategy of employing emotive or ethical terms in the French social context. Philosophically, argumentatively, and linguistically, questions arise about what renders a word emotional or ethical.

In France, as in Italy, Austria or Denmark, certain words and concepts exist that transcend mere descriptions of fragments of reality. For instance, terms like „protest,“ „empowerment,“ „injustice,“ „solidarity,“ or „identity“ carry with them more than simple descriptions of states of affairs or mere conceptual content. They are laden with emotional and ethical connotations, shaping how individuals perceive and engage with socio-political issues. In light of this political landscape and the dynamics of social contestation and Populism among Blacks and Muslims in France, exploring the underlying mechanisms that render certain words and concepts emotive and ethical in the context of French social and political discourse becomes crucial. This examination may provide insights into the strategies employed by various actors to influence minority and ethnic public opinion and mobilise support within this complex and evolving socio-political arena.

Ultimately, our research culminates in a comprehensive synthesis of findings and a discussion of their broader implications for understanding Populism in diverse cultural and political contexts. Through this exploration, we aim to shed light on the evolving dynamics of ideology, social status, and political radicalism in a rapidly changing world.

Because these are the main normative elements we analyse and try to understand, it is essential to comprehend the phenomenon of Black and Muslim Populism in Europe and how it is evolving within the social, identity, and political spheres.

Muslim Populism in Europe is a complex phenomenon that has gained prominence recently. It involves the rise of political movements or leaders who claim to represent the interests and values of Muslim communities within European countries. This form of Populism is often driven by the socioeconomic, cultural, and political challenges faced by Muslim populations, and it seeks to address their concerns and grievances. To better understand Muslim Populism in Europe, one must consider its origins, key characteristics, and implications. This type of social and thinking phenomenon can be traced back to various factors, including immigration patterns, socioeconomic disparities, and identity politics. Many European countries experienced significant waves of Muslim immigration during the post-World War II period, forming distinct Muslim communities. Over time, these communities faced discrimination, unemployment, and cultural integration issues, which contributed to the emergence of populist movements (Bakare, 2015, pp. 82-84). Like other forms of Populism, Muslim Populism tends to adopt an anti-establishment stance. Leaders portray themselves as outsiders challenging the political elite, whom they accuse of neglecting the needs of their communities. At the same time, European Black Populism has roots in the history of colonialism, immigration, and post-colonial migration. European countries have significant Black communities resulting from their colonial past and more recent immigration from Africa, the Caribbean, and other regions. The experiences of racism and discrimination these communities face have contributed to the emergence of Black Populist movements.

This movement is fundamentally anti-racist, seeking to combat systemic racism and racial discrimination in all aspects of society. It advocates for equal rights and opportunities for Black individuals and communities (Hicks et al., 2018). Black Populist movements focus on addressing socioeconomic disparities, including issues like employment discrimination, educational inequality, and racial profiling by law enforcement (Garand et al., 2017; Nielsen, 2013).

Thus, the two concepts have a prominent feature of Black and Muslim Populism in Europe is the utilisation of identity politics. Populist leaders within Muslim and Black communities emphasise the importance of religious and cultural identity, often portraying themselves as defenders of Islam and Muslim values against perceived threats (Vertovec, 2010). This identity-based approach resonates with many Muslims who may feel alienated in their societies. However, it is crucial to recognize that Black and Muslim Populism are not monolithic entities, and there are variations in their goals, strategies, and ideologies across different European countries. While some movements emphasize inclusivity and social reform, others may employ more exclusionary rhetoric and nationalist undertones. In response to the challenges posed by Black and Muslim Populism, European societies and policymakers must engage in constructive dialogues and address the underlying issues that fuel these movements. This includes tackling systemic racism, promoting social and economic equality, and fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion for all citizens, regardless of their cultural or religious background.

Our study holds significant implications for understanding contemporary Populism and its manifestations within the unique French socio-political context. Firstly, it contributes to the burgeoning field of populism studies by shedding light on the less-explored dimensions of Populism within minority communities, specifically Black and Muslim populations in France. While Populism has been predominantly associated with majority political movements, this research underscores its presence and influence within marginalised communities. Understanding how and why these groups turn to Populism is essential for a more comprehensive grasp of this political phenomenon.

Secondly, this study serves as a critical examination of the role of emotive language and rhetoric within the dynamics of Populism. By delving into the tactics used in the French context, where the rise of social contestation has been notable, it offers valuable insights into the strategies employed by populist movements and their leaders. This analysis has the potential to illuminate broader patterns of populist communication and propaganda, enriching our understanding of how populist narratives take shape and resonate with diverse audiences.

Lastly, this research contributes to the development of populism studies by providing a nuanced examination of the French socio-political landscape. France, with its complex history, diverse population, and unique political traditions, offers a rich and multifaceted case study for understanding the interplay between social contestation, Populism, and minority empowerment. By contextualising these phenomena within the French experience, this study not only broadens the scope of populism studies but also offers valuable lessons for policymakers and scholars seeking to comprehend the evolving dynamics of populist movements in diverse democratic societies.

## **2. Existing approaches to the problem of social and political Populism**

In this section, we embark on a comprehensive journey through the labyrinthine landscape of populism studies. Populism, as a political phenomenon, has attracted substantial scholarly attention in recent decades. The concept itself is multifaceted, evolving, and often elusive. Scholars have approached Populism from various theoretical angles, attempting to unravel its essence, identify its key components, and contextualise its manifestations. In this research paper, we align with scholars who adopt an ideational approach, considering Populism as a set



of ideas that can be either strategically employed or stem from genuine conviction (Applebaum, 2020; Morelock & Narita, 2018; Jansen, 2011). This perspective allows us to delve into the core ideas and principles that underpin populist movements, enabling a more profound understanding of their dynamics.

The concept of Populism has a rich historical tapestry, weaving its way through different epochs and regions. Populist movements have left an indelible mark on political landscapes, challenging established power structures and often championing the cause of the marginalised, as Revelli (2019), Grant (2021), and Muller (2016) have affirmed. To comprehend the contemporary manifestations of Populism, it is essential to trace its historical roots. This review will briefly traverse the historical evolution of Populism, emphasising key moments and figures that have shaped its trajectory.

In the last four decades, Europe has witnessed a resurgence of populist movements. These movements have gained traction, sometimes reshaping national politics and even altering the course of European integration. We will examine the development of populist movements in Europe, with a specific focus on France, to provide a context for our exploration of Black and Muslim Populism within the French socio-political landscape. Understanding the broader trends in European Populism will allow us to situate the unique dynamics of Black and Muslim Populism within a larger framework, illuminating their distinct characteristics and significance.

Scholars who have ventured into the labyrinth of populism studies have often grappled with defining the concept's core elements. Some have sought to distil Populism's essence into a minimal definition. Figures such as Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove (2014), Kriesi and Pappas (2016), Rooduijn (2014), and Van Kessel (2014) have proposed various formulations, highlighting key ideas that constitute Populism. These ideas typically encompass the existence of two homogenous and divergent groups engaged in a permanent antagonistic state. In this binary worldview, one group is idealised as virtuous, representing social and political morality, while the other is cast as an exponent of degeneracy and oppression (Bonacchi, 2022, pp.33-35). The central tenet is the belief that the virtuous popular will, often originating from a fringe group, should prevail (Akgemci, 2022, p.39). These conceptual frameworks provide a theoretical foundation for our exploration of Populism's ideological underpinnings and its manifestations among Black and Muslim communities in France.

## **2.1 Populism and its variants in Europe**

Populism in Europe presents a multifaceted panorama characterised by a rich tapestry of ideologies, strategies, and regional nuances. Although the core premise often revolves around the empowerment of the „people“ against a perceived corrupt elite, the specific contours of Populism's expression can differ significantly from one country to another (Becker, 2020). Understanding the diverse manifestations of Populism in Europe is pivotal to appreciating its development in France.

Across Western Europe, populist movements have surged in recent decades, often coalescing around anti-establishment sentiments, concerns about globalisation, and resistance to the erosion of national identities (Gandesha, 2018). The Five Star Movement and the League have harnessed these sentiments in Italy, focusing on issues such as immigration and scepticism toward the European Union (Pasquino et al., 2013). In Spain, Podemos emerged as a left-wing populist force, challenging conventional politics with a focus on social justice and anti-corruption measures.

In Eastern Europe, populist parties have harnessed nationalist and Eurosceptic sentiments to garner substantial support. Viktor Orbán's Fidesz in Hungary epitomises this trend, advocating for populist nationalism and challenging EU norms. Poland's Law and Justice party (PiS) similarly combines populist rhetoric with socially conservative policies.

Turning to France, populist movements have also left their mark. The National Rally, under Marine Le Pen's leadership, has consistently attracted voters with anti-immigrant and Eurosceptic stances, amplifying concerns about cultural identity and the EU's influence (Margalit, 2019). Additionally, the *Gilets Jaunes* (Yellow Vest) movement, a leaderless grassroots uprising that ignited in late 2018, signifies a distinct form of Populism in the country. It united around economic disparity, taxation, and social justice grievances, showcasing how populist sentiments can converge into a potent force for change (Satre et al., 2021).

Furthermore, within the French context, there has been a notable intersection of populist sentiments with social contestation, particularly among Black and Muslim communities. Left-wing populists have fuelled this contestation by emphasising inequality, discrimination, and social justice. This dynamic sometimes culminates in protests and riots as these communities demand systemic change. These instances underscore the complex interplay of Populism, socio-political contestation, and minority empowerment within the French socio-political landscape.

The *Gilets Jaunes* (Yellow Vest) movement, which erupted in late 2018, stands as a distinctive and intriguing facet of Populism in France. This grassroots movement, notable for its decentralised and leaderless nature, converged around a shared set of grievances resonating deeply with a broad society. At its core, the movement articulated concerns primarily rooted in economic inequality, burdensome taxation, and demands for social justice. What made the Yellow Vests particularly remarkable was their ability to mobilise without a traditional party structure or charismatic leader, challenging conventional notions of populist movements (Brannen et al., 2020, p.26).

The Yellow Vests' Populism was characterised by a fervent belief in the primacy of the „people“ over established elites and institutions. Their rallying cry, „We are the people,“ encapsulated their desire for direct democracy and a rejection of the political establishment. This fervour was fuelled by a perception that ordinary citizens were bearing the brunt of economic hardships while a disconnected political class thrived. Their demands for tax relief, a higher minimum wage, and greater social support illustrated a desire for a more equitable distribution of resources (Mortimer, 2019).

Although the Yellow Vests were not a traditional political party, they showcased how populist sentiments could transform into a potent catalyst for change. Their sustained protests, marked by mass demonstrations and sometimes violent clashes with law enforcement, pressured the government into making concessions on several issues. The movement's ability to mobilise and exert influence on policy discussions underscored the impact of populist sentiments even in the absence of a formal political structure. The Yellow Vests left an indelible mark on the French political landscape, demonstrating that populist movements can disrupt established political orders and amplify the voices of those who feel marginalised by the prevailing system (Mortimer, 2022a).

In the past year, France has witnessed a surge in social contestation and the emergence of social Populism among Black and Muslim communities (Mortimer, 2022b). The catalyst for much of this contestation has been the proposed social reforms announced by President Emmanuel Macron's government. These reforms, aimed at addressing various economic and so-

cial issues, have intersected with the distinct social identities of these communities, sparking a renewed sense of activism and protest.

Black and Muslim populations in France have long grappled with issues related to economic inequality, discrimination, and social exclusion. While designed to address broader societal challenges, President Macron's reforms have been perceived by some members of these communities as insufficient or neglectful of their specific needs. Consequently, these communities have mobilised to demand more comprehensive and equitable social policies.

The intersection of Populism with this social contestation is complex. Populist narratives often emphasise the voice of the marginalised „people“ against an elite seen as out of touch. In the context of Black and Muslim communities in France, populist leaders have sought to capitalise on these grievances, framing themselves as champions of the underrepresented. This populist rhetoric can fuel the flames of contestation, amplifying the sense of exclusion and injustice among these communities and further galvanising their demands for social reform. However, it is essential to note that not all social contestation within these communities is inherently populist. While Populism can serve as a channel for amplifying grievances, contestation often arises from a genuine desire for social justice and equality. Many activists within Black and Muslim communities are driven by a commitment to addressing structural inequalities and challenging systemic discrimination rather than merely seeking political advantage. Nonetheless, the confluence of Populism with social contestation among these communities underscores the complex dynamics at play in France's evolving socio-political landscape.

## **2.2 French Populism – appeals, cultural integration and identity politics**

France has witnessed a complex interplay of Populism, cultural integration, and identity politics in its socio-political landscape. As the nation grapples with economic disparities, political polarisation, and cultural and religious identity issues, populist appeals have surged, often echoing the sentiments of marginalised groups. This section explores the historical context, key political actors, and the role of identity politics in shaping contemporary French Populism, with a particular focus on the responses within the Black and Muslim communities.

French Populism, spanning the last two centuries, has exhibited a diverse and evolving character. In the 19th century, the emergence of the People's Party (Parti des Pauvres) marked an early manifestation of populist sentiment. This movement represented the interests of rural and working-class communities and underscored the divisions between the urban elite and the rural populace. It revealed the enduring appeal of Populism in addressing the economic disparities and discontents of the disenfranchised (Rosanvallon, 2020).

The infamous Dreyfus Affair, which unfolded at the turn of the 20th century, injected a new dimension into French Populism. The controversy surrounding Captain Alfred Dreyfus's wrongful conviction for treason became a lightning rod for populist divides (Hyman, 1989; Wilson, 1975). The case exacerbated tensions between conservative and anti-Semitic elements of French society, with Populism manifesting in both camps. This period it has highlighted how Populism could be harnessed to advance specific ideological and cultural agendas, even as it underscored deep divisions within French society.

The latter half of the 20th century saw the emergence of the National Front (now National Rally) under the leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen. This far-right populist party capitalised on



anti-immigrant sentiment, Euroscepticism, and anxieties about national identity (Azani et al., 2020). Le Pen's appeal to the „forgotten French“ resonated with a significant portion of the electorate, signalling the enduring power of Populism in channelling discontent and challenging the political establishment (Hosking, 2019). In recent decades, left-wing Populism has also gained ground in France, with figures like Jean-Luc Mélenchon harnessing populist rhetoric to address economic disparities and social justice issues. This rich tapestry of French Populism over the years reflects its adaptability to evolving societal concerns and political dynamics.

Of course, the year 1968 witnessed a seismic wave of populist protests that swept across France, leaving an indelible mark on the nation's political and social landscape. What began as a student uprising against the conservative policies of President Charles de Gaulle's government rapidly escalated into a broader societal upheaval. The May 1968 protests, often called the „Events of May,“ were characterised by their fervent populist spirit.

At its core, the May 1968 protests were fuelled by discontent with the traditional political elite, economic inequality, and societal norms (Seidman, 1993). Initially advocating for university reforms, the student demonstrators found common cause with various segments of society, including labour unions, intellectuals, and artists. These populist protests unified diverse groups under a shared sense of alienation from the political establishment and a desire for greater social justice.

The protests highlighted the potency of populist appeals in times of socio-political turmoil. Populist rhetoric, emphasising the voice of the „people“ against the perceived corrupt elite, resonated deeply with a broad cross-section of the French population. Although the protests did not lead to a revolution in the traditional sense, they sparked profound changes in French society and politics. The populist spirit of 1968 left an enduring legacy, influencing political movements and shaping how social issues were addressed in the following decades.

Undoubtedly, identity politics and grassroots activism have played a central role in shaping the populist landscape in France. Figures like Rokhaya Diallo have emerged as prominent voices in Black and Muslim communities, advocating for racial and social justice. Their efforts have galvanised movements against police violence and systemic racism, aligning with broader identity politics trends (Beaman, 2017). Diallo, a journalist and filmmaker, has consistently foregrounded racial discrimination and social inequality in France. Her work has contributed to a broader conversation about the need for greater inclusivity and recognition of minority rights.

Within the spectrum of leftist politics in France, Populism and identity politics have found a place. La France Insoumise, with its leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, has embraced a populist approach that centres on economic equality and social justice. Recognising the discontent of marginalised communities, Mélenchon has positioned himself as a champion of their interests.

The Communist Party, while navigating its own populist tendencies, has also responded to the demands for greater inclusivity and social reform. It has acknowledged the importance of addressing the grievances of minority communities and integrating their concerns into its political platform. This dynamic underscores how populist sentiments and identity politics can influence and interact within the context of leftist movements.

On the far-right end of the spectrum, the National Front, now known as the National Rally, has capitalised on populist sentiments by framing itself as a defender of French identity against perceived threats from immigration and globalisation. Similarly, Éric Zemmour, a controversial political commentator and writer, has utilised populist rhetoric to amplify anti-immigrant and nationalist narratives.

In response to these populist voices, Black and Muslim communities in France have increasingly turned to populist discourse themselves. Fuelled by feelings of marginalisation and discrimination, some leaders within these communities have harnessed populist rhetoric to assert their demands for greater representation, social justice, and recognition of their rights. This dynamic underscores the complex interplay of Populism, identity politics, and cultural integration in shaping the socio-political landscape of contemporary France.

To sum up, French Populism is marked by its multifaceted nature, with appeals that span the political and social spectrum. Identity politics and activism have emerged as powerful forces within this landscape, with figures like Rokhaya Diallo and Assa Traoré advocating for change. The response within populist movements, including La France Insoumise and the Communist Party, reflects contemporary France's evolving dynamics of identity and politics. As populist voices resonate, Black and Muslim communities have increasingly engaged with populist discourse to amplify their demands, contributing to the nation's complex and ever-evolving socio-political landscape.

### **2.3. Populist theory and social groups**

Populist theory offers a lens through which we can analyse the dynamics of contemporary societies, particularly within the context of socio-political crises and their impact on various social groups. Here, we will explore the interplay between populist theory and the experiences of marginalised social groups, with a particular focus on the French social crisis and its reverberations within the Black and Muslim communities.

The Populist theory posits that populist movements often emerge during times of socio-political crises, driven by the discontent of marginalised groups who feel neglected by the political establishment (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2017). This premise finds a poignant illustration in the recent French social crisis, where economic disparities, political polarisation, and identity issues have fuelled populist appeals.

Within the context of France, the experiences of Black and Muslim communities are emblematic of how socio-political crises can intersect with populist support. Historically, these communities have faced systemic discrimination, economic disparities, and cultural and religious identity challenges. As the French social crisis deepened, these grievances became increasingly pronounced, leading to a surge in populist sentiments within these communities.

Populism's appeal lies in its promise to amplify the voice of the marginalised „people“ against an elite perceived as out of touch. In the case of the French social crisis, populist leaders have capitalised on the frustrations of Black and Muslim communities, framing themselves as champions of their interests. This dynamic has resulted in the emergence of populist voices within these communities, advocating for greater representation, social justice, and recognition of their rights. However, it is essential to recognise that not all social contestation within these communities is inherently populist. While Populism can serve as a channel for amplifying grievances, contestation often arises from a genuine desire for social justice and equality. Many activists within Black and Muslim communities are driven by a commitment to addressing structural inequalities and challenging systemic discrimination rather than merely seeking political advantage.

The French social crisis, marked by economic inequality, political polarisation, and identity issues, offers a pertinent case study of how populist theory and the experiences of marginalised social groups intersect. It illustrates how socio-political crises can create fertile

ground for the rise of populist movements, particularly when certain social groups feel excluded or unheard. In the context of Black and Muslim communities, the crisis has prompted an array of responses, from grassroots activism to the harnessing of populist rhetoric to advance their demands for social reform and political recognition. Moreover, the relationship between populist theory and social groups is complex and multifaceted. The French social crisis has provided a contemporary backdrop against which we can observe the convergence of populist appeals and the experiences of marginalised communities. This intersection highlights the adaptability of populist theory in responding to the unique challenges and grievances faced by different social groups, underscoring the dynamic interplay between Populism, socio-political crises, and the quest for social justice.

### *Mobilisation among black and Muslim groups in France today*

In examining the context of anti-Black and anti-Muslim populism in France and its connection to figures like Pim Fortuyn, it's essential to recognise that these populist movements are not isolated phenomena but rather part of a broader global trend. Pim Fortuyn, a Dutch politician known for his anti-immigrant and anti-Islam stance, emerged as a precursor to the populist wave sweeping Europe (Lucassen & Lucassen, 2015; Uitermark, 2012). His success in the early 2000s demonstrated the appeal of anti-immigrant and nationalist sentiments in the political landscape. Fortuyn's emphasis on cultural preservation and opposition to multiculturalism resonated with certain segments of the Dutch population.

This trend found resonance in France, where right-wing populist leaders and parties began to gain prominence, capitalising on concerns about immigration, national identity, and economic insecurity (Ellinas, 2007; Ignazi, 2003). Leaders like Marine Le Pen, Éric Zemmour, and even Emmanuel Macron and the surge of populist movements like the Yellow Vests showcased how anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments were being exploited in the French political discourse.

In analysing anti-Black and anti-Muslim populism in France, it becomes evident that these movements thrive on xenophobia, scapegoating minority communities for the nation's challenges. These populists frame immigration as a threat to French identity and culture, fuelling fears of cultural dilution. This rhetoric fosters divisions within society, leading to discrimination, exclusion, and sometimes even violence against Black and Muslim communities.

The anti-Black and anti-Muslim populism also intersects with economic anxieties, as populist leaders blame immigrants for job scarcity and financial strain. These narratives fail to address the structural issues contributing to economic disparities, instead offering simplistic solutions that target vulnerable communities.

Moreover, anti-Black and anti-Muslim populism in France has been amplified by social media, where extremist views can spread rapidly and find like-minded individuals, contributing to the radicalisation of some segments of society. This dangerous cocktail of xenophobia, economic grievances, and radicalisation has the potential to undermine social cohesion and further polarise French society.

In response, Black and Muslim counter-populism has emerged, advocating for inclusivity, social justice, and cultural diversity. Inspired by global activism, these movements seek to challenge anti-immigrant narratives and promote a more equitable and harmonious France. It is within this context of competing narratives and ideologies that France grapples with the con-

sequences of anti-Black and anti-Muslim Populism as it seeks to define its path forward in an increasingly complex and polarised world.

Values of Black and Muslim counter-populism emphasise the importance of inclusivity and diversity as core values of French society. It seeks to challenge the exclusionary rhetoric of right-wing populism by promoting the idea that France's strength lies in its pluralistic identity. Rokhaya Diallo (2012) and Assa Traoré have been vocal advocates for an inclusive France that respects the contributions of all its citizens, regardless of their ethnic or religious background (Willsher, 2023; Traoré & Vigoureux, 2017).

A central tenet of Black and Muslim counter-populism is the pursuit of social justice. This involves addressing systemic inequalities in areas such as education, employment, and criminal justice. Movements like „Black Lives Matter“ and „Justice for Adama“ (in reference to Adama Traoré) have drawn attention to cases of police brutality and called for reforms to ensure equal treatment under the law (Clarke, 2021). Counter-populism in these communities values cultural pluralism and recognises that France's cultural richness is a result of contributions from various ethnic and religious groups. It challenges the narrative that certain cultural or religious practices are incompatible with being French. Advocates argue that diversity should be celebrated and protected as a source of strength.

Of course, a counter-populism movement encourages political engagement as a means to effect change within the democratic framework. It emphasises the importance of voting, grassroots activism, and civic participation. Figures like those associated with the La France Insoumise platform and the French Communist Party have worked to build coalitions that prioritise social justice and inclusivity.

This kind of counter-populism has important implications for French society. Firstly, it offers an alternative narrative that challenges the divisive rhetoric of right-wing populism. By promoting inclusivity and social justice, it strives to bridge societal divides and foster a sense of unity among diverse communities. Secondly, it has the potential to influence the political landscape. The French Leftist movements like La France Insoumise and the French Communist Party have sought to harness the energy of these communities to push for progressive policies that address inequalities and discrimination.

### **3. Methods and research design**

This article is based on the study that represents the foundation of our PhD thesis, the auspices of the research belonging to the University of Naples „Federico II“ – Department of Political Studies. Commencing in 2020 amidst the challenging global socioeconomic backdrop prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, our research embarked on a quest to uncover direct and conspicuous correlations between Muslim and Black social groups and the exponential surge in support for Populism. Consequently, we empirically scrutinise the relationship between socioeconomic, cultural, and political integration and their potential links to Populism and political radicalisation. It is pertinent to acknowledge that our study is ongoing, with data collection in progress, and therefore, the findings presented herein are preliminary and subject to potential adjustments as new data emerges.

Our research approach is inherently phenomenological, grounded in the conduct of exploratory interviews with individuals from the two social groups, namely Muslims and Black people. These interviews are structured to delve into the concepts of Populism, social integration, economic integration, cultural identity, and acculturation.

Our study is underpinned by two distinct research models: the quantitative method and the qualitative method. The quantitative aspect involves data collection through opinion polls, while the qualitative research entails the analysis of communication strategies and non-verbal emotional responses elicited by disseminating key messages on Twitter, replete with mobilising terminology.

To carry out the survey, a nationally representative sample was established ( $N = 1010$ ); at the time of the presentation of the study, the available data came from the collection of results from 689 respondents ( $N_1 = 689$ ). Of these, 387 self-identified as belonging to negroid racial groups ( $G_a = 387$ ), while 302 were to Caucasian white groups ( $G_b = 302$ ). For an in-depth analysis of aspects related to the populist response and support for Populism, Group  $G_a$  was divided into two distinct groups – black individuals identified as Muslims ( $NG_{a1} = 198$ ) and black individuals identified as Christians ( $NG_{a2} = 189$ ). Within Group  $G_b$ , the exclusive religion is Islam in its various variations.

#### 4. Measures, results and discussion

The research encompassed a set of inquiries to examine the facets of social integration. By assessing the responses through a weighted approach, we could gauge the extent of socio-economic and cultural integration within the various groups in France. This methodology allowed us to derive insights into the degree to which these communities have become integrated into the broader social fabric of the country.

The key questions of the administered questionnaire primarily focused on the self-identification of the subject, the level of religiosity and participation in religious services, educational attainment and socio-professional integration, and self-perceived central-peripheral differentiation. Additionally, the sampled units were subjected to scaling questions regarding their political orientation and the level of support for political and social protest movements.

The results of the first part of the research have provided us with an overview of individuals' personal and social characteristics. Thus, we can draw a preliminary conclusion that the economic and cultural integration of Muslims and people of colour is challenging in France due to French society's segregational and discriminatory nature.

The interpretation of the aggregated data has highlighted significant differences between the study groups regarding employment, socio-professional integration, and educational levels.

Within group  $G_a$ , 53.22% of respondents (206 units) reported facing challenges in labour market integration, with 33.21% stating they were employed part-time and 21.87% were not integrated into the labour market. Among those not integrated, more than half were beneficiaries of some form of state social assistance.

In group  $G_b$ , 138 respondents, representing 45.69% of  $NG_b$ , declared they were fully employed in the labour market. Among the units in  $NG_{a1}$ , two-thirds faced a lack of job opportunities, while the situation for units in  $NG_{a2}$  was much better.

This underscores the existence of an exclusive and discriminatory labour market, at times even racist, especially given that group  $G_{a1}$  is significantly less represented than group  $G_b$ , where 62.11% of respondents are employed. However, 57.39% of survey respondents ( $N_1 = 689$ ) stated that they found it very challenging to secure employment.

Certainly, the level of socio-professional integration is directly influenced by the variables of education and age. Thus, the table below shows that 44.4% of respondents have received



vocational education, while 26.6% have completed high school. Interestingly, only 13% of survey respondents have stated that they are under social or subsidiary protection.

Regarding the analysis of Groups Ga and Gb, the situation is similar to that of the entire studied population. However, a higher proportion of black Muslims declare having only primary education. In both cases, those with secondary education are underrepresented in the labour market.

#### Level of education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	still at school/university	152	22.0	22.1	22.1
	primary education or less	14	2.0	2.0	24.1
	secondary education	183	26.5	26.6	50.7
	vocational diplomas	306	44.3	44.4	95.1
	academic diplomas (including universities, Grandes écoles, and specialized schools)	34	4.9	4.9	100.0
	Total	689	99.7	100.0	
Missing	System	2	0.3		
Total	691	100.0			

#### Social or Subsidiary protection is existing

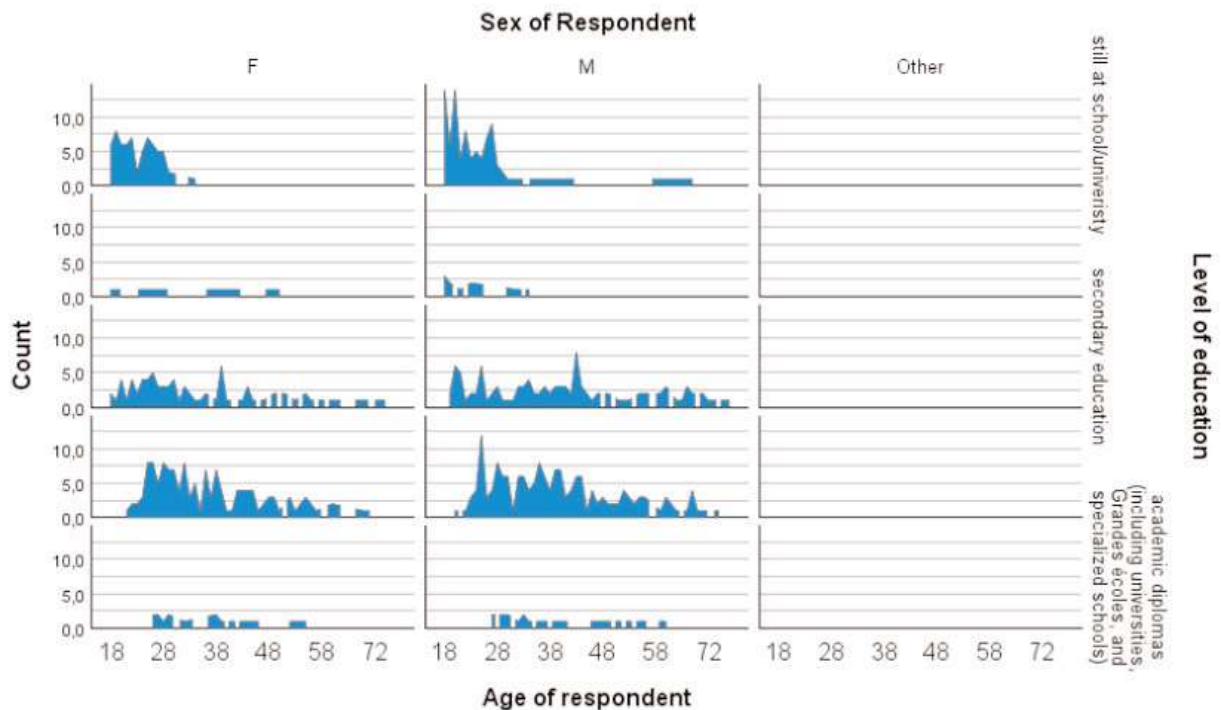
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	no	550	79.6	85.1	85.1
	yes	96	13.9	14.9	100.0
	Total	646	93.5	100.0	
Missing	-99	43	6.2		
	System	2	0.3		
	Total	45	6.5		
Total	691	100.0			

Among the respondents who are still enrolled in a form of education, only those in the 18-25 age group face difficulties in finding employment, with 73.18% stating that they desire to be employed but cannot find a job.

Next, the second phase of our research focused on assessing the ideological and political inclinations of the participants, as well as their self-identification within these ideological frameworks. Consequently, survey respondents were tasked with positioning themselves on a scale ranging from 0 (Left-wing) to 10 (Right-wing), as well as on another scale spanning from 0 (progressive) to 5 (conservative). Additionally, participants were queried about their political engagement within the host society.

The aggregated results revealed several significant aspects of our research. Concerning ideological self-identification, the results were significantly influenced by the variables of age, gender, and religion declared by the respondents. In  $G_{a1}$ , 66.02% of respondents identified themselves as supporters of the political Left, while only 33.98% identified as Right-wing supporters. Among the women in  $G_{a1}$ , 32.46% declared themselves as Right-wing supporters, with an average age of 31.25 years. The variation among men in  $G_{a1}$  is more pronounced, with the majority (60.18%) tending to identify as conservatives.

Regarding group  $G_{a2}$ , the Right-wing received more support from the respondents, with both women and men declaring themselves as supporters of the Left and the Centre: 32.11% stated they voted for a Left-wing party, and 30.52% declared they voted for Centre parties. Regarding the level of education, within Group  $G_a$ , 39.1% of respondents have tertiary education, while 33.58% have secondary education. Within group  $G_b$ , the conservative tendency is much stronger, as 41.08% self-identify as conservatives, and in terms of education level, it is similar to that of group  $G_a$ . Across the entire population subjected to analysis, there are significant variations in terms of gender, age, and education, as can be observed in the table below.



One relevant finding from the analysis of the collected data is that the religious factor also influences the gathered information; 78.92% of respondents state that they practice some form of religion.

At the same time, when respondents were asked to express their attraction to one of the French parliamentary political parties, the following characteristics emerged: 48.32% declared an attraction to the rhetoric of populist parties, even though they identified these parties as the primary source of discrimination. Moreover, the left/right ideological orientation predicted a strong preference for populist rhetoric, with men being more predisposed to challenge the current French socioeconomic order.

Concerning the support of participants for a protest or empowerment movement aimed at addressing issues of inequality and social exclusion, the result showed that more than one-third of respondents had participated in a political or social protest at least once. The simple upward trend towards the political Left was significantly higher when the respondent's viewpoint aligned with straightforward ideas for addressing socioeconomic discrimination, such as promoting employment, conditional acculturation, and cultural illiberalism. Therefore, 55.01% of respondents who had participated in a protest at least once stated that they had voted for left-wing parties.

Clearly, the relationship between value judgments and emotions, as investigated by cognitive approaches to emotions created by communication in the virtual environment, interactions with others, and individuals' cultural identities, is evident. Hence, we can observe that almost two-thirds of our survey respondents have stated that they have formed an opinion about the situation in French society based on the ideas formulated by opinion leaders, and 76.49% believe that more morality is needed in politics and society.

Not surprisingly, 72.39% have declared themselves dissatisfied or deeply dissatisfied with the way France is governed, indicating a real need for change. Additionally, a similar percentage (70.45%) believe that the President and the French government do not act in the interest of citizens but rather in the interest of the country's social and political elite. Therefore, we can conclude that the social and economic issues facing France compel our reference groups to contest the power structure in France vertically.

Furthermore, given that the idea of restrictive immigration policies is present across the political spectrum, social and cultural illiberalism, as well as Euroscepticism, being constants in the political discourse of the opposition, 53.76% of respondents believe that France should improve its immigration and asylum policy but do not see its tightening as viable. Another significant insight from our research is that over half of the participants in our study self-identify as belonging to the marginalised sphere of French society, primarily due to their socioeconomic and professional conditions.

## **5. Conclusion**

Through this study, we have explored various factors associated with the socio-cultural and cultural integration of minority groups in France, comparing them to two distinct groups: Muslims and people of colour. So far, the aggregated data have shown few significant differences between the two groups, but nuanced differences are expected to emerge, especially in terms of the Left-Right alignment. Our findings reveal that among the studied groups, the distinction between right and left does not solely lie in self-identifying as progressive or conservative, as political Populism attracts supporters from these disadvantaged categories, especially since France is grappling with real social problems and a lack of vision concerning integration, assimilation, and equal opportunities policy development.

At the same time, the combined aggregated results face more socioeconomic uncertainty among the studied groups, emphasising the exposure of a profound difference between the studied groups and the rest of the French population. Moreover, emotions and discriminatory attitudes lead to populist responses and political and cultural extremism, even self-segregation among disadvantaged groups.

Rafal Riedel's assertion, as highlighted in his study (Riedel, 2017), offers valuable insights into the underlying dynamics of populist support. Populism often simplifies complex political

ideologies into a binary framework of ‘good’ versus ‘bad.’ In this dichotomy, ordinary citizens are portrayed as the virtuous ‘good’ people, while an external ‘other’ represents the ‘bad.’ This oversimplified narrative resonates with those who feel threatened or marginalised in some way. These individuals may perceive themselves as victims of societal forces beyond their control.

Low self-esteem and a negative self-perception can create fertile ground for populist appeals. When individuals harbour doubts about their worth or feel alienated from mainstream society, they may be more receptive to populist messages that promise to restore their perceived dignity and importance. Populist leaders often portray themselves as champions of the marginalised, offering a sense of belonging and empowerment to those who feel disenfranchised.

From a cultural standpoint, two prevailing ideas further influence respondents’ attitudes. Firstly, there is the notion of moral superiority linked to religious identity. Some individuals may derive a sense of moral righteousness from their religious beliefs, viewing themselves as defenders of their faith or values in a changing world. Populist rhetoric that aligns with these beliefs can resonate strongly with such individuals, reinforcing their support for populist causes.

Secondly, frustration with the perceived failure of Western cultural perspectives to address socioeconomic issues plays a significant role. When individuals believe that mainstream politics and policies have failed to improve their economic well-being or address their concerns adequately, they may turn to Populism as an alternative. Populist movements often present themselves as a break from the establishment, promising a fresh approach that prioritises the interests of the ‘common people.’

In essence, Riedel’s insights shed light on the multifaceted nature of populist support. It is not solely driven by ideology or policy preferences but is also deeply intertwined with individuals’ self-perceptions, cultural identities, and responses to perceived societal failures. Understanding these psychological and cultural dimensions is crucial for comprehending why and how Populism gains traction among certain population segments.

## Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Note

The study results are under the correlation process, and the data presented in this article may change.

## References

- Akgemci, E. (2022) ‘Authoritarian Populism as a Response to Crisis: The Case of Brazil’, *Uluslararası İlişkiler / International Relations* 19, 37–51.
- Akkerman, A., Mudde, C. & Zaslove, A. (2014) ‘How Populist Are the People? Measuring Populist Attitudes in Voters’, *Comparative Political Studies* 47, 1324–1253.
- Applebaum, A. (2020) *Twilight of Democracy. The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*. Penguin Books Ltd, New York, NY.
- Azani, E., Koblenz-Stenzler, L., Atiyas-Lvovsky, L., Ganor, D., Ben-Am, A. & Meshulam, D. (2020) *Far Right – The Organizational Change, The Far Right – Ideology, Modus Operandi and Development Trends*. International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT).

- Bakare, N. (2015) 'Muslims and the Charlie Hebdo Saga', *Policy Perspectives* 12, 81–104. <https://doi.org/10.13169/polipers.12.2.0081>
- Beaman, J. (2017) *Citizen Outsider, Children of North African Immigrants in France*. University of California Press, Oakland.
- Becker, M. (2020) *The CIA in Ecuador*. Duke University Press, Durham.
- Bonacchi, C. (2022) *Heritage and Nationalism, Understanding Populism through Big Data*. UCL Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1wdvx2p.9>
- Brannen, S.J., Haig, C.S. & Schmidt, K. (2020) *A Globalizing Offense–Defense Contest, The Age of Mass Protests*. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).
- Clarke, M.B. (2021) *When we say Black Lives Matter*. Wren & Rook, London.
- Diallo, R. (2012) *À nous la France!* Michel Lafon, Neuilly-sur-Seine.
- Ellinas, A.A. (2007) 'Phased out: Far Right Parties in Western Europe', *Comparative Politics* 39, 353–371.
- Gandesha, S. (2018) 'Understanding Right and Left Populism', in J. Morelock (ed.) *Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism*. University of Westminster Press, pp. 49–70. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv9hvtcf.7>
- Garand, J.C., Xu, P. & Davis, B.C. (2017) 'Immigration Attitudes and Support for the Welfare State in the American Mass Public', *American Journal of Political Science* 61, 146–162.
- Grant, W. (2021) *¡Populista!: the rise of Latin America's 21st century strongman*. Head of Zeus Ltd, London.
- Hawkins, K.A. & Kaltwasser, C.R. (2017) 'The Ideational Approach to Populism', *Latin American Research Review* 52, 513–528.
- Hicks, W.D., Klarnier, C.E., McKee, S.C. & Smith, D.A. (2018) 'Revisiting Majority-Minority Districts and Black Representation', *Political Research Quarterly* 71, 408–423.
- Hosking, G. (2019) 'The Decline of Trust in Government', in M. Sasaki (ed.) *Trust in Contemporary Society*. Brill, pp. 77–103.
- Hyman, P. (1989) 'The Dreyfus Affair: The Visual and the Historical', *The Journal of Modern History* 61, 88–109.
- Ignazi, P. (2003) *Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0198293259.001.0001>
- Jansen, R.S. (2011) 'Populist Mobilization: A New Theoretical Approach to Populism', *Sociological Theory* 29, 75–96. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2011.01388.x>
- Kriesi, H., Pappas, T.S., Aslanidis, P., Bernhard, L. & Betz, H.-G. (eds.) (2016) *European populism in the shadow of the great recession*, Paperback edition. ed, ECPR – studies in European political science. ECPR Press, Colchester, United Kingdom.
- Lucassen, L. & Lucassen, J. (2015) 'The Strange Death of Dutch Tolerance: The Timing and Nature of the Pessimist Turn in the Dutch Migration Debate', *The Journal of Modern History* 87, 72–101. <https://doi.org/10.1086/681211>
- Margalit, Y. (2019) 'Economic Insecurity and the Causes of Populism, Reconsidered', *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33, 152–170.
- Morelock, J. & Narita, F.Z. (2018) 'Public Sphere and World-System', in J. Morelock (ed.) *Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism*. University of Westminster Press, pp. 135–154. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv9hvtcf.11>
- Mortimer, G. (2022a) 'Who would want to lead such an angry France?' [WWW Document], *The Spectator*. URL <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/who-would-want-to-lead-such-an-angry-france/>
- Mortimer, G. (2022b) 'Is the New York Times right to say Muslims are fleeing France?' [WWW Document], *The Spectator*. URL <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/is-the-new-york-times-right-to-say-muslims-are-fleeing-france/>
- Mortimer, G. (2019) 'Yellow Vests are copying the French left's worst traditions' [WWW Document], *The Spectator*. URL <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/yellow-vests-are-copying-the-french-left-s-worst-traditions/>
- Muller, J.-W. (2016) *What Is Populism?* University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.
- Nielsen, J.S. (2013) *Muslim political participation in Europe*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.
- Pasquino, G., Newell, J.L. & Mancini, P. (2013) *Leaders, Institutions, and Populism: The Future of the Western Liberal Order*. German Marshall Fund of the United States.



- Revelli, M. (2019) *The new populism: democracy stares into the abyss*. Verso, London; New York.
- Riedel, R. (2017) 'Populism and Its Democratic, Non-Democratic, and Anti-Democratic Potential', *Polish Sociological Review* 287–298.
- Rooduijn, M. (2014) 'The Nucleus of Populism: In Search of the Lowest Common Denominator', *Governance and Opposition* 49, 573–599.
- Rosanvallon, P. (2020) *Le siècle du populisme: histoire, théorie, critique*, Les livres du nouveau monde. Éditions du Seuil, Paris XIXe.
- Satre, J., Lahbib, B., Kiesle, M., Aucoin, C., Miller, A., Henic, A., Audibert, N.M., Mehiair, L., Goos, C., Iurchenko, I., Vlas, C. & Latre, R. (2021) *France. The Yellow Vest Movement, Political Disorder in Europe*. Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project.
- Seidman, M. (1993) 'Workers in a Repressive Society of Seductions: Parisian Metallurgists in May-June 1968', *French Historical Studies* 18, 255–278. <https://doi.org/10.2307/286966>
- Traoré, A. & Vigoureux, E. (2017) *Lettre à Adama*. Éditions du Seuil, Paris.
- Uitermark, J. (2012) *Dynamics of Power in Dutch Integration Politics, From Accommodation to Confrontation*. Amsterdam University Press.
- Van Kessel, S. (2014) 'The Populist Cat-Dog: Applying the Concept of Populism to Contemporary European Party Systems', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 99–110.
- Vertovec, S. (2010) 'Towards post-multiculturalism? Changing communities, conditions and contexts of diversity', *International Social Science Journal* 61, 83–95. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2451.2010.01749.x>
- Willsher, K. (2023) 'I have fought every day since': Assa Traoré's campaign for justice after brother died in police custody' [WWW Document]. *The Guardian*. URL <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/24/i-have-fought-every-day-since-assa-traores-campaign-for-justice-after-brother-died-in-police-custody>
- Wilson, S. (1975) 'Catholic Populism in France at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair: The Union Nationale', *Journal of Contemporary History* 10, 667–705.