

Democracy Devouring Itself:

The Rise of the Incompetent Citizen and the Appeal of Right Wing Populism

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For 60 years after the end of World War II, democratic governance has flourished and expanded its reach. Now it appears this process has stalled and is even reversing in many of the established democracies of Europe and North America. Momentum now appears to be with right wing populist alternatives to democratic governance. In Western Europe, this is evident in the continued rise of the AfD in Germany, the success of the 'leave' vote in the UK, in the growing popularity of the Northern League in Italy, and in Le Pen reaching the second stage of the French presidential elections. The ascendance of right wing populism is even more apparent among the newly established democracies of Eastern Europe as is exemplified by the rise to power of the Freedom and Justice Party in Poland and the Fidesz party in Hungary. Perhaps even more significant has been the success of right wing populist movements in the United States with the emergence of the Tea Party and culminating in the election of Donald Trump in 2016. Among advocates of democratic governance, this has raised serious concerns about the current well-being and future prospects of democracy (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018).

In attempting to make sense of these developments, I will argue that they are not the result of fluctuating circumstances or a momentary retreat in the progress toward ever greater democratization. Adopting a broadly political psychological perspective, I instead will suggest they reflect a structural weakness inherent in democratic governance, one that makes democracies always susceptible to the siren call of right wing populism. I will further argue that as practices in countries such as the United States become increasingly democratic, this structural weakness is more clearly exposed and consequential. In the process, the vulnerability of democratic governance to right wing populist alternatives becomes greater. Hence the conclusion that democracy is likely to devour itself.

Right Wing Populism: A Preliminary Definition

Right wing populism (RWP) is often considered as point further to the right of conservatism and thus its ideological cousin. This view has been expressed both by some political scientists studying contemporary right wing parties (e.g. Dunn, 2015) and by advocates who have attempted to legitimate their cause to a conservative audience attract (e.g. Bokhari and Yiannopoulos, 2016). In my view, this is misleading. The intellectual roots and underlying logic of RWP are best understood as an outgrowth of the fascist ideologies of the early 20th century as evident in its rejection of liberal democratic conception of the nation and citizenship. That said, RWP, like all ideologies is not assimilated by mass publics (and even the majority of their leaders) as a coherent political vision, but rather as family of political attitudes. It is viewed here accordingly, albeit in a manner informed by an appreciation of its neo-fascist underpinnings.

As suggested by Mudde (2007) in his influential statement, RWP is comprised of a family of political attitudes that can be divided into three clusters: populism, nativism and authoritarianism. In its populism, RWP identifies its constituency as 'we the people.' The 'people' here are ill-defined but generally comprise the entirety of ordinary citizens. The definition is given some clarity by what the people are not and to whom they are opposed. This

is typically the ‘elite,’ social, economic, political and intellectual. RWP advocates for the people in their struggle against this elite who are characterized as exercising unwarranted power over the people and unfairly benefitting from the fruits of their labor. The power of the elite is exercised through their control of democratic processes like elections, dominant political discourses and core governmental institutions.

RWP also incorporates what Mudde calls ‘nativism’ or what is alternatively referred to as ‘ethno-nationalism.’ Here the people, as a nation, are given clear, substantive definition. They are distinguished in a variety of concrete ways. These include the specific core beliefs they all hold, the particular behaviors and rituals in which they all engage, the aspects of their physical appearance they share (e.g. race or style of dress) or the origins they have in common (e.g. a history or ancestry). This definition of ‘who we are’ typically also entails a depiction of who we are not. This other fails to share our distinguishing characteristics and is often opposed to us as a matter of practice as well as definition. Thus ethno-nationalism of RWP readily leads to a competitive view of international relations and an accompanying xenophobia. This is opposed to a liberal democratic, more civic conception of nationalism in which the people are defined not by their origins, appearance, beliefs or behavior, but by their legal status as citizens.

The third defining component of RWP is its authoritarianism. This has two core aspects. One pertains to its conception of the leadership. Guided by its roots in ideological fascism (e.g. Gentile, 1928) and its affinity to the fascist governments of 1930s Germany and Italy, RWP tends to delegate unusual power to its leadership, more specifically its key leader. This leader embodies the will of the people, renders it clear for everyone else and executes accordingly (Muller, 2016). Thus distinctions between the leadership, the people as a whole and individuals are blurred as their will is joined in a single purpose. The authoritarianism of RWP is also evident in its hierarchical conception of power. In this view, society is naturally and necessarily organized in a way that involves a centralization of power at the top and then a delegation of different degrees of power at lower levels of governmental control. This enables right and effective governance of the nation in pursuit of the collective will. From this perspective, democratic institutional arrangements designed to constrain governmental power are nonsensical and only serve to obstruct the state’s ability to act on behalf of the people.

In each of its populist, ethno-nationalist and authoritarian aspects, RWP constitutes both a rejection of and challenge to the liberal democratic ethos and the structures of democratic governance which now prevalent in Europe and North America. Sometimes regarded as pre-World War II relic, RWP now appears to be ascendant even in the most well-established democracies. Moreover the challenge of RWP has in fact a recurring factor in American and European democratic politics for the last 150 year (Molnar, 2016). The attempt to understand the appeal of RWP has spawned an interesting body of research. Focusing on individual differences in support for right wing parties or attitudes, the psychological research has established a clear effect of stable personality characteristics such as right wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation and also of somewhat more contingent characteristics such as insecurity,

weak identity and mortality anxiety (Adorno, et al., 1950; Altemeyer, 1988; Jost, 2003). With a similar focus on individual differences, the sociological research has shown that stable demographic characteristics such as being less educated, working class or a member of a dominant ethnic group tend to predict support for the right wing (e.g. Arzheimer, 2016). Focusing on the resonance between more changeable social conditions such as increased economic inequality, general economic decline, increased immigration or demographic changes with persisting but latent right wing predispositions, others have attempted to discuss fluctuations in the prominence of right wing politics in terms of these changing conditions and how they have been appropriated by right wing populist leaders and mass media channels. (e.g. Bonikowski, 2017).

My aim here is to supplement these efforts by taking a broader theoretical perspective. I introduce a conceptual framework which integrates sociological and psychological considerations with a focus on the interplay of the structuring forces of political institutions and culture on the one hand and citizen capacities on the other. With this in mind, I offer a more careful consideration of the social psychology of both democratic and right wing populist governance. In analyzing these two forms of political governance, I adopt a structural pragmatic perspective (e.g. Rosenberg 2002, Ch. 2; 2003).ⁱ Viewed from this perspective, the politics of given society is understood to be dually structured, at a collective level by the terms of that society's institutional arrangements and political culture, and at an individual level by the nature of citizen's understandings and orientations. Both these levels of structuration operate upon everyday social and communicative interaction. In so doing, they delimit the basic nature of what may be permissible and valued, and meaningful and true. However these structuring forces not only shape how people act towards and talk to one another, they are also affected by how these activities actually unfold in day to day life. In this manner, so far as people interact in ways that deviate structural regulation imposed upon them, the underlying structuring force that is attempting to orchestrate their behavior will itself be potentially altered or transformed.ⁱⁱ

The ways in which people actually interact and communicate deviates from the structural regulation imposed upon them is not only random, the result of the perturbations introduced by particular circumstances. Importantly, it also reflects how that interaction and communication is simultaneously structured both by the social meaning and regulations imposed by the larger social context and by the personal meanings and strategies constructed subjectively by the individuals involved. What people do and say is the concrete point of intersection between these two structuring forces of social and political life. As such, it is also the point where each level of structuration can penetrate and affect the other. The critical point for our analysis here is that where these two levels of structuration, collective and individual, parallel one another, each operates to validate and maintain the other. Where these structuring forces are incompatible, each will regulate concrete practices in a way that undermines, destabilizes and possibly transforms the other.

In the following two sections, the structural forms of democratic and RWP forms of governance will be analyzed and contrasted. This will include a consideration of how each type of governance structures political life at three levels: the integration of the collectivity, the orchestration of communicative interaction, and the determination of individuality. In so doing, we will examine how the same distinctive structural logic underlies the construction of meaning and organization of action characteristic of a given form of governance at each levels and how the various levels are congruent with one another.

Democratic structuring of politics

Culture and institutions. The collective structuring of democracy is realized both in the logic of its cultural construction and its institutional organization. In both aspects, the polity is constituted as an artifice, a constructed system of relationships that is organized according to abstract principles that reflect the qualities of those involved its construction and their interdependence on one another. In its cultural conception, the polity is understood to be mechanism created by its individual citizens to serve their individual and collective purposes. As such it is defined as decision-making apparatus and a referee. In this context, individual members of the polity, citizens, are understood to be self-constituting and self-organizing systems. They are reflective, rational and self-directing. As such individual citizens have an essential integrity or existence that is defined apart from their place and participation in the polity. Their relationship to the state is a rational, legal one. The state exists to serve the individual's purposes (in conjunction with those other individuals involved) and individuals are connected to the state by a set of legally defined obligations and rights. The evaluative or normative dimension of collective life is also defined in these terms. Insofar as the collectivity is a mechanism created by individuals for coordinating their action and realizing their interests, individuals emerge as the only source of meaning and value in social life. As such they become ends unto themselves. Political values and principles are derived accordingly. In these terms, democracy defines as fundamental the values of freedom (as the expression of that personal integrity) and equality (the recognition that all individuals have that integrity). In recognition of both these values, the decision-making and regulatory functioning of the state must be guided by a notion of justice as fairness.

The structure of democracy as system of relationships among self-constituting individuals is realized in its institutions as well. Some institutions are designed to translate individual claims and wants into collective judgments and decisions. These include processes such as referendums on specific issues and elections of representatives in which there is free and equal participation by all individual citizens. This is extended to the functioning of legislative bodies where the voting procedures are used to aggregate the preferences of elected representatives to make policies directing state action. In addition to these collective decision-making institutions are judiciary ones who primary responsibility is to adjudicate conflicts that arise between individuals and between individuals and the state. In doing so, the mandate of these institutions is to protect the integrity and equality of citizens. Typically this is embodied in codes that

prioritize individual rights, private property and voluntary contracts between individuals and insure that all are treated equally before the law. In this context, power, defined as the capacity to compel the action of another individual, is regarded as potentially problematic. Democratic governance is structured to function with the voluntary agreement of its citizens and thus on the basis of cooperative decision-making. In this light, the exercise of power always constitutes a potential violation and is therefore carefully monitored, directed and constrained.

Public sphere. In a manner that parallels its structuring of the political culture and the institutions of government, democratic governance extends to the structuring how citizens engage one another in public sphere. Communicative engagement there is ascribed distinctive purposes and structure. The aim is to construct a shared understanding of the circumstances they are addressing so that the individuals involved can come to agreement on the actions they should collectively take. In terms of the communicative activity itself, this entails recognizing that the interlocutors each has a subjective frame of reference, their own personal systemic construction of the issue at hand, and that their communicative task is to bridge their various subjective points of view by forging a intersubjective or common understanding. This bridging activity requires that individuals actively reflect on their own understanding of the issue and the different understanding of others, so that they can offer reasons for the claims they make about the nature and dynamics of a situation and how they are to be judged (their good and bad aspects) to others in terms that those others can comprehend and accept. At the same time this self-reflective activity must include a consideration of the relevant claims and justifications introduced by others and how they bear upon and may be incorporated into one's own understandings and judgments. In both aspects, this bridging effort entails recognizing the differing subjective perspectives of the individuals involved and integrating them in a way that creates an intersubjective understanding.

In all aspects of this communicative process, claims of the specific knowledge of a relationship between actions or actors, or judgments of their specific value are understood to be embedded systemic frames of reference or understanding. In this light, it is readily understood how the apparently same knowledge claims or evaluative judgments may operate differently or mean something different depending on the systemic context in which it is embedded. This systemic construction underpins the communicative recognition of subjective perspectives and how they differ from one another that is characteristic of the democratic public sphere. It also underpins how dimensions or sub-systems of an issue may be differentiated from one another. It is these terms that the construction of an understanding of the particular circumstance (its elemental qualities and their dynamics) can be distinguished from a judgment of its value (how it may serve or violate other's personal needs or those of the group). In Habermasian terms, the reflexivity of this kind of communicative practice enables a differentiation of the truth (or knowledge) of an issue from the right (or normative value) of that issue (Habermas, 1984). Thus either can be bracketed or set aside to facilitate the pursuit of the comprehension of the other.

In a democratic polity, the communicative activity in the public sphere is structured accordingly. The public sphere is open and accessible. It is organized so as to encourage participation by all who might be interested. The public sphere is also free. Those entering the public sphere must be encouraged to speak openly and without impediment. The public sphere is also egalitarian. All participants are given equal voice, both in speaking and being heard. And finally the public sphere is deliberative. It is organized so that it facilitates an exchange between citizens in which each can elaborate their own claims and constructively address the claims, reasons and justifications of others.

The qualities of citizens. Finally democratic governance also extends to the structuring of the qualities of its individual citizens. Democratic citizens are constituted as independent, emancipated subject/agents. They are self-directing and self-defining. Associated with this are certain cognitive capacities and emotional orientations. To effectively self-direct, the individual must have the cognitive capacities for integration and abstraction. They must be able to observe the particulars of a situation including their position in it and relate them to one another and to a larger context in which they may be embedded. With this systemic understanding of the situation, the individual can discern its dynamics in light of the various causal influences that are operating on it and the various effects that different interventions may have. This enables the individual to act in a way that is not simply response evoked by a stimulus, but rather reflects a broader consideration of the nature of the stimulus and possible responses to it. Thus the individual is not only able to act in a presumably more effective way, but also in a more fully self-directed one.

This integrative and self-consciously construction of the situation also extends a reflective construction of on one's self. To this end, individuals must hold their initial perceptions view of a situation and their preferred response to it in abeyance and consider their significance in light of other relevant perceptions and beliefs that constitute their understanding of people and politics. Similarly one's initial opinion may be considered relative to other relevant opinions and values that are linked in the context of one's broader basis of evaluation. With this requisite reflection, the individual is not simply oriented by their immediate reaction to a situation, but is able to consider what is wanted in light of the totality of who he or she is. This also underlies the individual's capacity for self-directed action.

The self-direction democracy requires not only has a cognitive component, but an emotional one as well. In order to be able to act, the individual has to be comfortable doing so. The initiation of action requires self-confidence. In order to initiate action on one's own terms, one has to believe that one has the capacity to formulate what one wants to do and then to execute accordingly. In a related manner, self-directed action requires a sense of security. To initiate action, one must have the sense that one can do so without bearing too high a cost. Insofar as individuals feel they are insufficiently able to act without failure or that taking action will necessarily expose them in danger, they will not initiate action in their own terms. Either

they will not act at all or will limit themselves to action which is sanctioned or compelled by others.

The democratic person is not only constructed as an independent, self-directing actor, but also as social being who stands in relation to others and connected to them. Again there are cognitive and emotional dimensions to this status of a connected person. The cognitive dimension reflects a further elaboration of the systematic quality of thinking already discussed. Here it extends to an understanding that individuals, even as subjects with personal perspectives and personalities, are interdependent on one another. This involves recognizing that who individuals are, their subjectivity and personality, are realized through and thus a reflection of how they are able to act and express themselves. However this is never done in isolation, but always as an initiative directed toward others and or as a response to them. Thus who individuals are and can become is in important part determined by the nature of their relationship with the people with whom they regularly interact. This sense of interdependence importantly renders an individual's action to be other oriented as well as self-directed.

The connected quality of the individual has an important emotional dimension as well. It consists of an affective bond between people who depend on one another to achieve similar ends. It is evident in feelings of sympathy and empathy whereby people have the capacity to feel things as others do. One important result of this is the ability in social life to go beyond respecting the integrity of other people to caring for them. In caring for others, we come to value them in some of the same ways we value ourselves. We consequently act toward them in a way that both brings closer to us and us closer to them. Like their cognitive counterpart, the emotional dimensions of the independent and connected selves support each other. The self-confidence and security of the independent self are more readily attained in an environment of sympathetic, caring connection and such an environment is more readily sustained by people who are confident and secure.

With these cognitive and emotional capacities, the individual is constituted so as to have the competencies required of democratic citizenship. For the purposes of contributing to collective decision-making, the individual has the capacity to understand issues and events by considering their position in the broader context of the structure and dynamics of political life. Similarly the individual has the capacity to consider the importance or value of those issues and events relative to their impact on the system as whole and thus for the people as a group. At the same time, the individual is able to analyze his own position relative to what is being considered and its personal value for him as a person. Not only are individuals capable of thus formulating plans for action for the group or themselves individually, they are also to try and execute those plans. In the latter regard, they have the requisite self-confidence to initiate action or push the collective in the desired direction. They also have the requisite sense of security, such that they can do so without any immobilizing or undermining fear or sense of threat. When entering the democratic public sphere, individuals also have the capacity to communicate with each other effectively for the purpose of cooperation. They are able to reflect on their own perspective and

thus on the reasoned bases of their own understanding and judgments. They are also able to listen to the claims and judgments of others and to integrate them in a way that allows them to understand the subjective perspective that others are bringing to the discussion. This enables them to communicate constructively by giving reasons and justifications which are sensible in each other's terms. Moreover they are able to do so in a way that is respectful of others and the views they express and caring of them and their well-being. Thus not only are they able to understand the various perspectives that may be voiced on an issue and build bridges between them, but they are also motivated to do so.

In sum, we see the different political, social and psychological layers at which the structure of democratic governance is manifest. The structure of political institutions, the nature of cultural definitions, and the mode of communicative engagement and the constitution of individual actors are all structured in a similar manner. At each level, the focus is on interactions and relationships and how they are integrated in systems. These systems give these constitutive relations their meaning and value and define their dynamics. As such these various layers or levels of political life integrate and support one another. In other words, they co-operate in maintaining a state of relatively stable equilibrium.

Right wing populist structuring of politics

Right wing populist governance may be viewed in similar terms. It also reflects a dual structuration of political life that is manifest in how political institutions and culture, the communicative engagement in the public sphere and the nature of individual citizens are organized and defined. There structuring logic here is, however, very different than in the case of democratic governance. It revolves around concrete actions, simple categorization and hierarchy.

Culture and institutions. Consider first the quality of the definitions and values characteristic of RWP political culture. Here the collective is conceived as a simple concrete category, the nation. The nation is a unitary whole, the collective embodiment, quite literally, of the people. The people are themselves defined as a largely undifferentiated mass, one that is constituted by its membership, as nationals in the whole to which they naturally and inextricably belong.

This collective whole, the nation, is defined by what it does and where it is going. It has a defining trajectory or mission. This trajectory and the collective actions this involves are the expression of the national will or aspiration. Typically the mission is one of making the nation great and, in a related way, of making it powerful relative to others. This national will, while expressed in general terms such as making the nation great (again), is concrete and specific. Reflecting a hierarchical construction of the relation between nations, it is defined in terms of concrete goals which position us relative to others such that we dominate or win their approval. Examples include: to win in the Olympics, to achieve military control over other nations, and to

make our culture respected and mimicked by others. At the same time, it is defined by the concrete actions it takes to realize those goals. So it is defined by the collective effort and sacrifice the people make to train hard to win at sporting events, to be first in science and the arts, and to pay for and maintain a powerful army.

In all of this, the nation is an end unto itself. The nation and, by implication, the people it embodies is the source of value in political life. The national will is the ultimate end. All political actions and subsidiary goals are judged accordingly. This is also the case for specific institutions or laws. They are all evaluated in terms of the degree to which they serve the national will or facilitate its realization and are consequently retained or dismantled accordingly. Social, political and scientific claims are similarly judged by this standard.

In this political cultural conception, individuals have a secondary and somewhat derivative status. They are rendered meaningful and valued insofar as they are part of the collective, the people and the nation. Individuals are thus constituted as a mass who share a single common significant characteristic – they are members of the nation. Differences between individual members are thus ignored or diminished. In the latter regard, individuals, as nationals, are both assumed and encouraged to share certain defining concrete characteristics such as a common appearance, common beliefs, common practices or rituals, common ancestry or common trajectory. In this conception, the individual and the nation are inextricably intertwined, the line between them blurred. As suggested by philosophers of fascism such as Gentile (1928), the state is realized in the people and the people are realized in the state. It is a symbiotic relation. Individuals are realized in their participation in its mission, by what they do in the service of the national will. It is here that they are at once defined and valued, recognized and glorified.

Political institutions of RWP are structured in similar terms. The political state is the manifestation of the people. As such it is tasked with accomplishing the national will and at the same time maintaining the integrity of the people as a collective whole. Political institutions are thus crafted to facilitate action and exercise guidance and control. They are authoritarian. The institutional structure that complements this understanding of nation and the pursuit of the national will is that of a simple hierarchy, something like a military structuring of power. Here control emanates from the top. It is this highest level of leadership that is assumed to best reflect the national will and give it specific expression and direction. Both derived from and defining of the national will, the authority of this highest level is supreme. To accomplish its goals, the leadership uses the institutions of the state to address the many tasks national action requires. To this end it creates different successively lower levels of authority and command that are assigned specific administrative functions. Throughout the hierarchy, authority, and the legitimacy and control it confers, emanates from the highest level.

At the bottom of the hierarchy are the individual citizens. Their political role is defined by their bond to the people as incarnated in the nation and its leadership. This is expressed in the

demand for their loyalty to the nation, their participation in the national will and their subordination of any falsely conceived independent self. The state regulates them accordingly. Thus the political and legal status of individuals is constituted by a set of obligations, rather than one of rights. To insure these are properly executed, there is a program of guidance in which identification to the nation is encouraged and control in which deviation is punished, often severely. Indeed to reject the authority of the state is to distance oneself from the national will and consequently remove oneself from the people. The individual at this point loses meaning and value and is treated accordingly. Complementing this political regulation of individuals from above is an alienation of individuals from one another. As a member of the nation, individuals are defined by and obligated to the nation and its authority, not to one another. In this context, interpersonal connections and loyalties may be regarded as competitors and actively discouraged. Only if they are understood to further the national purpose will they be supported. Thus family relations may be supported, but only insofar as they foster reproduction and encourage national identifications and loyalties.

In this politics of will and concrete action, power does not have the ambiguous and somewhat negative status accorded to it in democratic governance. Here it is an unsullied good, the very lifeblood of the people and by implication its individual members. It is through the exercise of power as effective action that the national will is expressed and achieved. As such power is to be embraced, both in its authoritative exercise and in filial submission to it. Moreover the authoritative and thus legitimate use of power has no limits. In the realization of the individual in the people and the people in the nation, there is no meaningful divide between the social and the political or the public and the private. The social and the political are united and there is the only the public and what is hidden, always inappropriately, from it. Thus power in the service of the national will may be used ubiquitously and freely.

Public sphere. The structure of right wing populist governance also operates to delimit how individuals engage one another in the public sphere. Again the focus is on the realization of the national will. Communication is structured to serve the demands of collective action. To do so, it operates in two complementary ways. On the one hand it provides a means for the expression of authoritative dicta and broadcasting them to an accepting followership. On the other hand, it provides a means of individual self-realization through expressive participation in the whole. In the spoken repetition of shared beliefs, it allows many individuals to speak in one voice. In both aspects, communication is less about active cognition, reflection or argument, and more about directing action and emotional connection, a means of bonding individuals to the people, the nation and their leadership.

In this context, knowledge has a distinctive form. It is focused on concrete actions, particular statements, actors and groups of actors. These are understood as they are observed as thus as objective. These objective entities are understood in two ways. On the one hand, they may be understood categorically. That is set of actions or actors may be identified as the same insofar as they are linked to the same cognitive anchor, the same action or actor. Thus all people

who do the same thing (such as perform a common ritual), appear the same way (they have the same skin color or wear the same uniform), are acted upon in the same way (are commonly victimized or treated in the same way) or come from the same origins are understood to be the same. Hence the importance ascribed to a common ethnic or racial identity or the performance of common rituals in the definition of the nation. On the other hand, actions or actors may be linked causal linearly. Thus a series of specific actions and actors may be combined to form a linear chain of activity in which a cause produces effect that then is cause to a subsequent effect and so on. In a social or political context, this chain of causality provides a framework of understanding of the hierarchical structure of power as emanating from a source and filtering down. These categorical, causal and hierarchical knowledge structures are concrete and specific. Consequently, overall understanding is fragmentary.

This kind of knowledge is constructed in two ways, either through direct experience of the objective facts or an accepted account of that experience. In RWP communicative practice, the authoritative account takes precedence. It trumps both all other accounts and direct personal experience. The leadership of the nation is thus the authoritative source of knowledge about all aspects of collective and personal experience. For individuals, this knowledge is something to be learned and internalized. It is passively received rather than actively constructed. Here the construction of knowledge becomes yet another venue for the exercise of power. Power defines knowledge and knowledge operates to sustain power. Knowing is also very much a collective activity. For the individuals involved, it therefore has a strongly emotional component. To know something is to be joined to all those who also know it in the same way.

Structured in this way, the knowledge of right wing populism operates in a manner which eliminates, blurs or reconstitutes certain key distinctions characteristic of the more democratic forms of knowing described earlier. One is the distinction between the intersubjective and the subjective. In the RWP conception, both are folded into a common field of what is authoritatively ascertained to be objective. Thus a notion of differing cultural or personal perspectives gives way to the simple distinction of correct and incorrect beliefs. Democratic concerns for authenticity are reduced to determinations of whether a person is telling the truth or lying. Moreover this last issue also takes on different meaning in a right wing populist context. Here the line between claims of truth (what is the case) and claims of right (what should be the case) are blurred. Here both are subsumed under the authority of what serves the national will. Like the duality of the meaning of the term 'normal' which suggests both what is the case and what should be the case, the authoritative dictates of a nation's leadership describes the world as it is and should be.

The public sphere of right wing populist communication is structured accordingly. It is centralized and hierarchical. Statements of truth and right originate in the authoritative expression of the national will by the leadership. Communicative structures and technologies are organized to communicate those messages through the institutional hierarchy and directly to the citizenry. Political control is exercised over all media of mass communication and favors the

development of technologies which have a one-to-many form. In this context, alternative communicative structures are proscribed. Particularly lateral communication between individuals that does not entail the rehearsal of authoritatively sanctioned discourses is actively discouraged.

The RWP public sphere is also structured so as to create opportunities for the collective expression of the national will. The aim here is to provide venues for individuals, through the performance of common rituals and the joint rehearsal of collective truths, to come together as one in a visceral realization of the 'people.' An excellent example is the mass rally. It provides a multifaceted opportunity in which the people are physically present, their focus is on the authoritative leadership and the individuals there share in the experience of the spectacle that renders the many one. Something of this effect is also achieved in more local contexts through the creation of adult and youth clubs that are organized to forge a common identity (one that is joined with that of the nation) through the rehearsal of authoritative claims and shared ritual practices. Throughout, the communicative practice in the public sphere is suffused with an emotional, often ecstatic, quality, one that reflects and promotes the symbiotic union of the leader and individuals in the nation or the people.

The qualities of individuals. RWP governance also entails the structuring of the qualities of individuals. Here the individual is constituted as dependent and spontaneous. This is reflected in the quality of their cognition. When attending to a situation, they focus on its concrete specific, the actions, statements and actors involved. They make sense of these elements by recognizing the concrete active linkages that are observed or report to exist between them. The resulting knowledge consists on focusing on a concrete anchor action or actor and then recognizing how other actions, statements and actors are linked to it. In this manner, simple categories, linear causal relations and hierarchies are constructed. The knowledge of a specific concrete anchor grows by learning more of the things with which it is linked and thus more of its categorical and linear causal attributes.

The knowledge individuals construct this way have a number of distinguishing attributes. First the knowledge is not an integrative, but an inchoate list of specific knowledges that pertain to the actor or action in question. Second, although they are subjective constructions, for the individuals who think this way, knowledge acquires a kind of objective reality similar to that of the objects they are intended to comprehend. In this they, not only reflect what is the case, they also come to define the case. As such, the knowledges of social life not only constitute an understanding of what people do to whom under what circumstances, they also constitute rules whereby the behavior of those people in those circumstances can be judged. In the process, the subjective understanding of the 'truth' of situation and the 'right' of that situation are poorly distinguished.

This way of thinking renders a person dependent on others. Here to understand something is to know how it is linked to other actions or actors. This in turn depends on direct

observation or report of the linkages in question. Typically in everyday social life, the experience of people, actions and situations afford an individual multiple opportunities to directly observe what is happening and to hear others' reports about it. Where personal observations and others' reports coincide, knowledges are constructed comfortably with certainty. The problem arises, as is typically the case, where one's own observations are inconsistent with each other or with the observations of others. The result is confusion, because the individual lacks the requisite cognitive framework for placing these various conflicting claims or judgements relative to one another and then adjudicating among them on some reasoned basis. Instead the individual must rely on others to determine the truth of the matter. This can only occur when others largely agree. Authoritative agents, particularly those who embody the judgment of the group and define its fact, values and desired practices, will be particularly influential. This does not entail submission to authority. Such an act of submission implies an independent construction of knowledge which is reluctantly abandoned. Instead, people naturally rely on authority figures to help them know how things really are and therefore how they must be. Consequently what individuals know is largely a product of social learning and thus a reflection of the social conventions and authoritative judgments to what they are exposed.

The individual of RWP is also an emotional being as well as a cognitive one. Indeed, as it offers as degraded view of people's cognitive abilities, RWP celebrates their emotionality. With its focus on realizing the national will and the action it requires, the individuals' feelings and their vigorous expression are valued over their thoughts and useless contemplation. The former is strong, alive and vigorous, the latter weak, decadent and diminishing. A person is not so much a thinker, but a physically healthy, emotional and motivated actor. The best of these emotions are those that bind the individual to the group like loyalty and lead the individual to act for the group like valor. Another emotion, closely linked to the capacity to act, is aggression. Marshalled in the service of the national will, it too is highly valued. In interpersonal relations, it is to be expected and is generally tolerated.

As in their cognitive activity, the individual's emotionality renders them dependent. In both cases, the satisfying expression of one's individual nature depends on the reaction of others. As individuals' only know what is true and right when they are validated by others, so they can only feel secure and good about themselves when they are approved by others. Alone the individual lacks the meaning, value, direction and strength needed to confront a dangerous world fraught with confusion and uncertainty. As such their well-being depends on their incorporation in the group, particularly the nation. The nation gives them their knowledge of what is true and right. It thus supplies certainty and direction. It endows them with a social position and thus imbues them with meaning and worth. The nation protects them and provides security. In all of this connection forged is a deeply emotional one. When dormant it is a feeling of love and attachment. When realized in collective expression or action it is appropriately self-transcendent, ecstatic. As these positive feelings reflect what the individual has by virtue of this

union with the nation, other feelings reflect the fact of the individual's dependence and vulnerability. Consequently the love, attachment and ecstasy are laced with a fear and anxiety attendant on the ever present possibility of rejection by authority and excommunication from the group. Indeed this contributes to the intensity of the emotional bond of the individual to the group. It also insures that in their symbiotic relation to the nation, the individual is also submissive.

Before leaving this topic of the dependent, conjoined individual, it should be noted how this person orients to others. As suggested by the forgoing remarks, individuals are not led to orient to the group and authority, not to other individuals. The connections are vertical, not lateral. To the degree to which interpersonal connections acquire meaning or value, they do so in a derivative fashion. They are prescribed by authority and operate in the service of the nation. Thus the performance of family duties may become a matter of national obligation and are valued accordingly. In the process, husband, wife, parent and child are expected to become connected, but never in a way that replaces or takes precedence over the connection each has to the nation.

Having these cognitive, emotional and social qualities, the individual of RWP is well suited to competently execute their roles in social and political life. As citizens, they are unable to divine the general nature of the national will. On their own, they understand little of politics, society or themselves as individuals. However, they are ready and able to learn the particular things the authoritative expression of the will requires that they know and value. They also recognize the need to rehearse what they have learned and take pride and pleasure in doing so publicly and together. In so doing, they recognize themselves as part of the people and feel good about it and themselves. As citizens, they are also profoundly emotional beings. They draw on that emotion to connect themselves to the people and to the authority that expresses and realizes their collective will. They are ready to realize themselves by participating in realizing the nation. They are thus ready to act, not on their own initiative, but at the command of others. As such they are loyal, valiant actors who are to act as deemed necessary, thereby achieving honor and glory.

In sum, right wing populism, like the democratic alternative, is all of piece. The various levels at which it is realized, the macro level of institutional structures and culture, the micro level of the cognitive and emotional of individuals, and the intermediary level of communication and interaction, all structured in a similar way. Each level has a logic and set of formal qualities which parallels the others. As such, each level operates to support the others and is sustained by them. It is a coherent social and psychological system.

Diagnosis of our current times

Informed by these theoretical preliminaries, we can address the recent ascent of right wing populism, particularly on the American national stage. This ascent is, in my view, evident

in the rise of the evangelical right that began in the 1990s, the tea party that began in 2009 and more recently in the election of Donald Trump to the presidency in 2016. Of course, these various movements are complex and there is considerable variation of belief among the people involved in each case. However in central and defining ways, they incorporate the signature tenets of right wing populism, particularly as it would emerge in a dominantly democratic environment, and reflect its structuring tendencies.

The structural weakness of democracy. While recognizing that the rise and fall of RWP movements reflect fluctuating social and economic circumstances, I want to suggest that recent developments are manifestations of something more fundamental. They reflect a basic structural weakness in American democracy, one that renders it ever more vulnerable to the threat of right wing populist alternatives. This weakness is that democratic governance in America (and elsewhere) has not been successful in creating the citizenry it requires. Thus it is left with citizens who lack the requisite cognitive and emotional capacities to assimilate its cultural definitions and norms, to function in its institutional organizations and to participate in its public sphere. The claim I make here about the nature of the citizens in modern democracies, particularly the American one, is not new. However a consideration of its structural underpinnings and implications is.

Even as democratic governance was first being institutionalized, democratic theorists began expressing concerns regarding the capacities of democratic citizens. In the mid-19th century, J.S. Mill clearly recognized that the mass of people did not understand either the political issues of the day or the complexities of democratic governance. For Mill this was largely a problem of exposure. People lacked the information they needed to address political problems. He suggested two solutions to this problem: mass public education and free speech. A century later, theorists, confronted with the apparent failure of either of these to produce the desired levels of informed judgment, have advocated for more participation in policymaking. The assumption here is that that exposure to and responsibility for problems would insure that people gather the necessary information for informed decision-making (e.g., Pateman, 1970; Barber 1984). More recently, theorists have suggested the problem of citizen capacity is deeper than that of insufficient information or motivation and extends to their ability to understand and productively engaged the perspective of others. Rejecting Rawls' (1971, 1993) faith in the capacity of individual's to reflect on this on their own (even with the artifice of the veil of ignorance), these deliberative theorists have suggested the 'enlarged mentality' required for adequate understanding could be fostered if citizens were provided the opportunity to collaborate with one another directly in small groups for the purpose of recommending public policy (e.g. Guttman and Thompson, 2004; Benhabib, 1996). Throughout these various theorists, while recognizing serious limitations regarding citizen capacity, retain their faith in the ready manner in which these limitations can be overcome and democracy can function in stable and normatively appropriate ways.

Others have been less sanguine in the judgment of people's capabilities. This was clearly reflected in Madison's efforts to counter Jefferson's optimism about what the people and to design American government in a more republican and less directly democratic way. In the shadow of the collapse of democracy between the two world wars in Europe, other theorists, like Schopenhauer and Arendt, offered a very skeptical view of the present or potential capacities of democratic citizens. They suggest that the vast majority of citizens do not have the cognitive capacity or emotional wherewithal to act as reflective, critical subjects or self-directing actors. Instead they are prone to thoughtlessness, insecurity and fear in a way that makes them dependent on external direction. Therefore the people are always susceptible to the influence of populist demagogues and approving of the authoritarian regimes they seek to create. Despite the ascendance of democracy in the late 20th century and the attendant democratic ideological orthodoxy of political theory, this skeptical view has been echoed in recent calls for limited or selective mass political participation. (e.g. Brennan, 2016)

Questions regarding capacities and consequent competence of democratic citizens have also emerged in the empirical research of political science and psychology. The research on citizens' levels of political information indicate that despite the public schooling of several generations of Americans through the age of 18 and the widespread availability of mass mediated political information, they still seem to have very little information regarding democratic institutions or contemporary political problems (Delli Carpini, 1997). Not only are they not adequately informed, but they also do not seem to integrate the particular information they have into some broader understanding or perspective. This is reflected in research on political ideology. In work that began in the late 50's and early 60s with the American Voter (e.g., Converse, 1964) and has been replicated through to the present, it is evident that people do not draw on some general understanding or perspective when formulating their attitudes. Rather these attitudes seem independent of one another, the product of thinking which is in Lane's terms 'morselizing' rather than integrative. To the degree to which they are organized or integrated and thus subjectively integrated, this is the result of emotional needs and personality rather than rational reflection (e.g. Lasswell, 1930; Lane, 1962; Altemeyer 1996).

This political research is complemented by social psychological studies of social cognition. The cognitive dissonance research in the 1950s and 1960s showed that people were unable to set aside their prejudices when judging new situations (Abelson et al, 1968). Instead their judgments of what happened and how it was to be evaluated was strongly influenced by their pre-existing evaluations and affective predispositions. This was followed by two decades of research that focused on the cognitive side of this process, particularly how people constructed explanations and attributed causal responsibility for actions and events. This work on causal attribution laid bare the myriad of ways in which people's thinking was sub-rational and distorting, even when the situations being considered had not evaluative dimension or affective loading (e.g. Kelley, 1973). Going beyond this negative account of cognition as not or sub rational, more recent research has focused on how the pathways people's thinking does follow.

Some research, like the work on cognitive heuristics, has attempted to map the subjective structure of reasoning. It provides evidence of how, rather than engaging in reflection and rational processing, we rely on a variety of simplifying procedures and easy shortcuts to comprehend a situation and explain events (e.g. the seminal work of Tversky and Kahneman, 1982). Other research has focused on how the quality of people's thinking reflects their learning. This research has demonstrated that people learn chunks of associations (of a categorical or causal kind) which are retained as mental templates or cognitive schemas. Novel situations are then cognized by using a relevant schema to organize the elements of the new situation to be understood. Finally a third approach has emphasized that people's judgments are not importantly cognitive at all, but rather are an outcome of emotional reaction (e.g. Haidt, 2001, 2007). This research suggests that people may give reasons and arguments for their judgments as thus make it appear as if they are the result of reasoning and rational consideration. However this is really only 'motivated reasoning' or a post-judgment rationalization that is offered when one is called upon to explain their views. (e.g. Liu and Ditto, 2013))

As developed in a more specifically political context, the themes prevalent in this work are nicely summarized in two recent books, *The Rationalizing Voter* (Lodge and Taber, 2013) and *the Predisposed* (Hibbing, et al., 2013). In both cases, the authors emphasize that citizens do not think in the rational, reflective, integrative way suggested by democratic theory and associated conceptions of governance. Rather people's thought is fragmentary, a matter of prejudices and prior bits of knowledge that are cued by present circumstances and then applied to them. For the authors of *The Rationalizing Voter*, these circumstances are external and reflect what appear to people as the salient features of the context in which their reactions are being formed. The authors of *Predisposed* complement this external orientation by focusing on cues that emerge from within and reflect what they refer to as people's 'biologically predetermined behavioral predispositions.' In either case, people response is not a considered decision, but a circumstantial reaction. When required, justifications will be offered to others or even oneself, but even these shallow and largely conventional explanations will be nothing more than rationalizations of what is in fact a non-rational, unreasoned process.

In my own work, I have explored the underlying logic or structural qualities of people's thinking. In so doing, I have tried to offer a view of cognition functioning which integrates the insights of the various strands of political and social psychological research outline above (e.g., Rosenberg 2002; Rosenberg and Beattie 2018). Differentiating between several developmentally different levels of cognition, I suggest that the vast majority of Americans think in what I term a 'linear' manner. That is their focus is on concrete actors and actions. They make sense of these concrete objects by observing how they are similar to or follow on one another or by drawing on other people's accounts of how the objects are thus connected. In this way, they can also consider non-present (and even never present) actors and actions (like gods and personal intentions), but these tend to be understood in rather concrete and specific ways. Thinking in this way, people who think in a linear way know the world by constructing simple concrete

categories and linear causal relationships. The various knowledges thus constructed are specific to the matter learned and tend to be isolated from one another. When focused on political life, this thinking generates an understanding of social groups as comprised of action as governed by 'natural' and normatively right rules of behavior, of social groups or nations as categories of individuals who share the same characteristics, and institutions as hierarchies of status and power. Because people's understandings are concrete and fragmentary, they are largely unable to step back from an issue or situation to be considered and reflect either on the broader socio-political context in which that situation is located or on the broader subjective context in which one's initial response to that situation can be considered. As a result, their orientation to issues and events tends to be shaped by circumstantial factors. Elements of the situation at hand operate as cues evoking a specific relevant categorical, causal, or normative knowledge or an emotional or affective predisposition. In either case, the person's response is less subjectively considered and defined, but is more conditioned by factors beyond his or her full awareness or subjective control. As a result, over time and across situations, individuals' judgments are likely to reflect the schemas available in their cultural environment and their actions are likely to be oriented by social conventions to which they are exposed.

Implications – Incompetent Democratic Citizens

For the most part, democratic theory has not been impacted by this research. Partly this reflects the isolation of lines of academic inquiry and perhaps the orthodoxy of much Anglo-American political theory. However it also reflects the failure of empirical political scientists to honestly and fully consider the implications of their research. For the most part, these researchers have retained the resilient optimism of their counterparts who were writing democratic theory. Thus with no or very little grounding in evidence, they suggested that even though citizens may not currently appear to be competent democratic citizens, this was a matter of circumstance rather than capacity. Thus concluding comments to research are often include salvaging claims that people had the requisite capacity to be competent and this would be realized if they were better informed, more motivated to consider political issues, less consumed by the rest of their lives, more communicative engaged with others or were raised in environments that encouraged better emotional and personality development. The result is an acknowledgment of the problem, but one that diminishes and does not pursue its implications.

The psychological research is less forgiving. For decades, the work on social cognition regarded the conception of the individual as a reflective, integrative, self-directing agent as a straw man, one that was contradicted by a large and ever growing body of evidence. The resulting is a view of people as *inherently* fast (as opposed to slow and considered) and sub-rational thinkers who are heuristic, schema and emotionally driven processors of information. How they think and react is thus not circumstantial and readily remedied, but is instead indicative of what people really are. This is human nature and therefore something which is certainly not easily, and perhaps not even possibly, changed. However political theory is not the

business of psychology and social psychologists have not considered the implications of these findings for the functioning of political institutions and the conduct of political practices.ⁱⁱⁱ

Here let's consider take this social scientific evidence seriously and considers its implications for democratic governance. To begin, it suggests that the vast majority of American will be unable to make sense of a democratic form of politics and participate in it in the manner required. As citizens of a democracy, they are presented a cultural definition of the world that they cannot comprehend. They naturally think of the nation as concrete place inhabited by individuals who are bound to one another by the rituals, beliefs, practices, appearance and origins they share. Nevertheless, they are asked to recognize that the whole of which they are a part is comprised of a potentially diverse set of individuals who may vary in all the concrete ways in which people expect them to be the same. Similarly people are ask to understand what binds them together is not their shared concrete attributes but their legal definition and integration in to a complex system of relationships. Democratic citizens are also asked to think of themselves as subjects, the authors of their own meaning and directors of their own action. But most Americans focus on specific facts to be known, procedures to be followed and ends to be valued. People are what they do or say and these acts and the people acting are judged according to objective, shared standards. They don't consider or comprehend the meaning of subjectivity nor share the associated concerns of authenticity and true self-direction. Similarly they cannot understand morality in terms of a conception of justice as fairness and thus a politics that orients to the value of protecting the integrity of the individuals involved. The morality of social life inheres in believing and doing things that we all know to be appropriate and right.

Similarly democratic governance presents Americans with institutional arrangements which are difficult to understand. The US government is complex with a complex division of powers among somewhat equal branches of government, legislative, executive and judiciary, in which power and influence laterally as well as vertically. This is very difficult to comprehend from the perspective of most citizens who think of organizations as hierarchical entities in which power flows simply from the top down. Looking at their own government, they are confused. What they do understand is that there is seemingly unnecessary conflict within and between institutions and consequent inability to simply act as required. Similarly they do not understand the orchestrating, coordinating function of governance in which it is both regulator and referee. For them the role of government is to exercise authoritative control and to act in a way that achieves national goals. In this context, the centrality of the law as an institution which not only controls individuals, but authority itself is not understood or valued. Similarly the value of a judiciary independent of the direct control of the executive makes little sense. People would happily see both the law and judiciary compromised if required by the demands of authoritative and effective executive action. For them, governance is a matter of authoritative decision-making and control, and citizenship is a matter loyalty and submission. When either government or citizens do not act accordingly, they will be regarded to be incomprehensible and judged negatively.

As democratic governance confronts people with political context that is hard to understand or value, so it also asks them to participate in a public sphere in ways they cannot understand or therefore in which they cannot appropriately act. To enter the public sphere, they are asked to abandon their guiding assumptions about truth and right: that there are objectively true and moral claims, actions and ends and these are known by all. Instead they are required to understand that people enter the public sphere with subjectively and culturally different understandings that lead them to reasonably make very different claims about what is good and true. They are not only required to recognize this fact, but also to value the resulting alternative claims voiced out of respect for the integrity of the individual who voice them. Finally they are told to collaborate with others to bridge differences with the aim of constructing a shared understanding of what is the truth and right of the situation they are considering and the goals to which they should be aspiring. In sum people are being asked to value claims they know to be wrong or bad and to respect individuals, who by making those claims, reveal that they are stupid or evil people. On top of this, they are asked to engage these wrong minded people and their bad claims to construct a shared view of things. For the vast majority of Americans, not only is all of this incomprehensible and confusing, but it seems clearly wrong. Consequently, they either will either withdraw from the public sphere. If they may participate, but they will do so by voicing what they know to be true and right and engaging with others either for establishing solidarity with those who share their view or defeating those who do not.

Finally there is the issue of how individuals are supposed to understand and feel about themselves. They are asked to be free and self-directing. To reject the direction of conventional authority and tradition and instead 'discover' who they are in some essential underlying or overarching sense. Rather than rely on the approval conferred by others, they are supposed to generate their own internal sense of their worth. Then equipped with the requisite understanding and the emotional wherewithal, they are supposed to act accordingly. For most Americans this again makes no sense and creates an impossible demand. What they know and value is constituted by the authority and convention they are supposed to reject. Similarly they rely on others approval to know that they right and good. They have no other resources to draw upon to make their judgments, ground their sense of self-worth or direct their action. Insofar as they attempt to be critical and self-directing, they will simply reject their current authorities and traditions in favor of new ones much like adolescents rebelling against their parents. And like adolescents who are unleashed from the certainties of parental control, their sense of identity and worth are likely to become less secure and the confidence they require for independent action is likely to be reduced.

At the same time, they are asked to regard themselves as independent subjects and self-directing actors, they are also asked to feel connected to those around them. In so doing, they cannot do so in terms they can understand, that is on the basis of concrete commonalities of specific action and belief. Instead, the connection must be predicated on their difference and relationships of mutual interdependence. The latter consists of how each partner in a relationship

provides a venue for the other to talk and act in a way which enables them to explore who they are and who they can be for the other. This is negotiated through personal reflection on and communication about one's own and the other's subjectivity and personality and how those are elaborated and possibly transformed in the context of their interaction. For Americans this is an incomprehensible and impossible task. To the degree to which they feel compelled to try, they will search for authoritative guidance, the need for which has been met by the marketplace with the proliferation of self-help books such as *Getting to Yes* or *Mars and Venus*, that provides concrete recipes for how to act to 'realize' oneself and 'connect' satisfactorily with others. However in general being asked to connect in ways they cannot leaves people alone in a world with other people who are alien and estranged. The only relationship is one of competition as each seeks to realize selfish ends. The result is loneliness, weak self-identity and insecurity.

In sum, in a way that goes far beyond the initial concerns of democratic theorists, it appears that the majority of Americans are unable to understand or value democratic culture, institutions, practices or citizenship in the manner required. To the degree to which they are required to do so, they will interpret what is required in distorting and inadequate ways. As a result they will interact and communicate that undermines the functioning of democratic institutions and the meaning of democratic practices and values. If their inadequacy is made apparent, they will be unable to correct in the necessary way. Instead, they will simply be left confused, uncertain and insecure. This may simply lead them to withdraw from the public sphere of democratic life. Retreating into private life or unconsidered economic pursuits they may ignore and/or reject politics and eschew any form of political participation. Alternatively or additionally, they may seek alternative, more comprehensible and satisfying political direction and modes of interaction.

The Ongoing Attraction of Right Wing Authoritarianism

It is in this light that we can best understand the inherent tensions in the realization of democratic governance. It is asking the people to adopt both a definition of the nation as a whole and themselves as individuals they cannot comprehend and to internalize a set of orienting values, they cannot accept. Democratic governance thus undermines its citizens as individuals and leaves them feeling inadequate, confused and insecure. In reciprocal fashion, those individuals operate in the public sphere in substandard or deviant ways that undermine the meaning and legitimacy of democratic cultural imperatives and the functioning of democratic institutions. In midst of this, it is easier to appreciate the enduring attraction of right wing populism and the potential for its realization in a structurally contradictory and thus unstable democratic state.

Right wing populism provides the lost, lonely, alienated and frightened souls of democracy with an alternative vision and practice that is readily comprehensible, morally sensible and personally satisfying. In the place of the conceptual complexities of democratic cultural definitions and values, RWP offers a clear, simple definition of what is true and right.

The facts are objective, certain and authoritatively defined and they are construed in a way that serves the national and therefore one's own interest. Values such as loyalty binds individuals to the people and the leadership and codes of good behavior provide concrete direction of what one is to do when. Moreover individuals are not abandoned to the impossible task of understanding things and making judgments on their own, but are offered the necessary authoritative guidance and direction. RWP also provides a simpler, more readily understood organization of political life. The largely incomprehensible complexities of democratic power sharing, fair regulation and proper representation are replaced with readily understood hierarchical structures of administrative control. Power emanates from the top, a top which embodies and promotes the national interest, an interest that individual citizens, left to their own devices, cannot be expected to understand or know how to pursue. RWP also offers the concrete definition of we, the people and nation (and who they, others, are not) in terms of shared characteristics and behaviors, the kind of definition that resonates with how people think and are readily comprehended.

Right wing populism also offers a public sphere in which most people can readily participate and do so in appropriate and satisfying ways. It expressly invalidates the difficult, incomprehensible task mandated in the democratic public sphere of perspective taking in order to collaborate with others in the construction of political meaning and value; a task which leaves the people who cannot understand or perform it, confused, alienated and alone. The public sphere of RWP only requires that individuals attend to and internalize the authoritative dictates voiced by the leadership and reflecting the will of the people. They are then asked to rehearse these learned beliefs and actions when engaging with others and during the occasional mass events. These demands are readily understood and met. Moreover participation in these terms confers the approval and validation that secures individuals' sense of the world, directs their action and binds them to one another in emotionally satisfying ways. They are no longer lost, confused, inadequate and alone.

At the same time, RWP also validates whatever existential dread, anxiety and insecurity people living in a democratic and globalizing world are feeling. It also provides a solution. RWP recognizes a world that is fragmented into nations or groups who differ in their understanding of the world and in the values they uphold. But this is not the largely incomprehensible democratic world of differing interpretations, collaborative engagement and mutual benefit. Rather it is the easily understood world of us and them where we are right and they are wrong. It is a world where engagement is a zero sum game where interests necessarily collide and the result is some win as others necessarily lose. In this conflictual world, individuals are right to feel anxious and insecure. However the solution is clear. In ways people can readily comprehend, they can achieve a clear concrete identity and secure relationship to others through the twin processes of embracing the nation and accepting the authority of its leadership. At the same time, the nation and its leadership will protect "us" readily identified members of the nation from an also easily identified "them."

In sum, democratic governance is structurally weak and thus undermined from within. It lacks the citizenry to participate in its public sphere, operate in its institutions and understand its culture. The result is a distortion of the culture, its institutions and its public sphere. At the same time, those citizens are part of democratic system and are led to internalize and embrace definitions, values and practices they cannot understand. They are thus left alienated, directionless and insecure. Thus democratic functioning is undermined by its own citizenry. This nature of this weakened condition also suggests the greatest external threat democracy faces. It is one that offers a need people a vision and direction that they can understand, value and embrace. As argued here, right wing populism offers just such vision and direction.

The persistence of democratic governance: Structural reinforcements and elite control

We began with the attempt to understand why right wing populism is on the rise in democratic countries, particular the US. It is now clear that this question raises a prior one. Given its structural weakness, how have democratic governments been able to function, even if in suboptimal ways? The answer lies with both the impact of broader structural forces and the particular role played by democratic elites. Turning first to structural considerations, it is important to recognize how democratic governance is sustained by what have been termed the forces of modernity or post-modernity. Operating on arenas such as the economy and international relations, these forces are structuring these different domains of life in terms that are parallel to those of democratic governance. In so doing, they organizing and defining the economic, technical and international conditions of domestic political life in way that reinforces the democratic structuring of politics.

Perhaps most important is the effect of the capitalist organization of the economy. Like democratic governance, capitalism also operates as a system, albeit an economic one, that both regulates and is responsive to individual economic actors. As participants in a capitalist economic system, individuals are constituted to be rational, self-directing actors. As such they are self-regulating systems that are independent of each other and the larger capitalist system of which they are a part. Although independent and self-directing, individuals are at that same time integrated in the economic system and how they can interact with one another is regulated by accordingly. Thus their capacity for self-directed action is constrained is constrained by the rules of the field on which they are playing. Thus although they are independent entities, individual economic actors necessarily depend one another and the system of which they are a part. The resulting interdependent relationship is multi-dimensional and complex. It is competitive in a way that reflects economic actors striving to meet their individual ends relationship which is competitive. It is also collaborative in a way that the interdependence of these individuals' actors in their attempt to shape the system which organizes them and to achieve goals they share in common. The economic way life thus constructed is complex and fluid, rejecting both authority and tradition in favor of innovation and flexible adaptation and is doing so in a way which emancipates and empowers individuals. The parallel with the democratic structuring of political life is clear

Globalization and mass migration also provided structural support for democratic governance. Globalization positions one's country in a complex system of international relations that coordinates the relationships among independent, yet interdependent, nations. This interdependence and how it penetrates domestic life is evident across a range of ways in which countries are intertwined. With integration of markets through international trade, it has become clear that what we do here is dependent upon what they do there. This interdependence does not only have a competitive dimension. We buy each other's products and thus come to depend on them, not only for direct consumption, but also for incorporation in what we produce domestically, much of which we may, in turn, sell in foreign markets. It is also evident in the interconnection of cultures. Bits and pieces of foreign culture are attractive and become part of domestic life. This also highlights the multi-dimensionality of these international relations as we may be strongly disapproving of a country's foreign policy or economic dominance, but eagerly watch its films and adore its cultural icons. In sum, globalization positions us in a world where there are self-directing national actors who generate their own cultures and economies, but are at the same time inextricably intertwined with and dependent on the cultures and economies of others. It is a system of relationships which mirrors that of democratic governance.

This external impact of globalization on domestic conditions is complemented by structural changes fostered from within. These are the result of the mass migrations that of the last century. Nations, particularly the US, are populated by increasingly diverse populations. Citizens increasingly differ in their appearance (race), their customary practices, social and religious beliefs and origins. Despite this evident heterogeneity, they are citizens. They are thus identified abstractly, as legally identified participants in a shared political system, and in a way that recognizes the legitimacy of their differences, one which reflects individual understandings and preferences. Thus the concrete on the ground reality people face on a daily basis reflects the kinds of civic definition of citizenship that democracy promotes.

Finally there is the effect of structuring force of science and technology. This also contributes to the objective context of political interaction that complements democratic definitions and practice. Science for its part structures knowledge as something that is inter-subjectively constructed through communicative practices, the presentation of evidence and argument, that is protected from the exercise of power and recognizes the autonomy of individual participants. The resulting knowledge is systemic, an integration of relationships in the context of organizing, interpretative theoretical framework. It also defines dimensions of knowledge, such as knowledge of the truth and knowledge of the right, as independent of one another. As the structuring of scientific knowledge and communication parallels and thus reinforces the democratic structuring of these domains, so the practical application of science as technology also reinforces democratic practices. By its nature and particularly as it is articulated in a capitalist economic system, science driven technology prioritizes innovation. As such, it de-authorizes tradition and conformity. At the same time, it recognizes and promotes individuals'

creativity and imagination. Thus it emancipates the individual in much the same way as democracy does.

In sum, economic, global and technological forces operate to structure a world of interpersonal relations that in a way that parallels the construction of democratic governance. In so doing, they reinforce the conception of reality and modes of practice that democracy imposes on its citizenry. Democratic citizens may lack the cognitive and emotional wherewithal to understand and value the democratic vision being imposed upon them. However the nature of the economic, globalized and technological dimensions of daily life, while also confusing, appears to validate those definitions and to render them unavoidable.

These structural conditions thus favor the persistence of democratic structures, but unto themselves they are not enough to insure the requisite commitment to and compliance with democratic institutions and practices. In democracies like the US, this is somewhat ironically accomplished through elite control. Apart from maintaining democratic structures by their own participation in them, the elite also exercises its political power to insure that the mass of people participate in ways that at least appear adequate. This includes providing authoritative interpretations of democratic institutions and culture that translate this more complex entities and abstract orientations into simpler, more concrete terms. For example, an abstract political value like justice is reduced to treating people in the same specific ways. In the same way, abstract concepts like the integrity of the self and the associated notion of authenticity are reduced to the freedom to do or say what one wants. Direction for action is also offered in more concrete and specific terms. Thus collaboration in the public sphere for the purpose of collective decision-making is reduced to voicing your personal opinion and casting a ballot for one of several provided alternatives at the time of the occasional election. In the process, the elite reduced the need for individual citizens to think on their own or direct their action which is some sense authentic while, at the same time, giving them the requisite direction so that they appear (to themselves and to others) to understand their political context and to be adequately performing their democratic role.

Elites exercise this control in several ways. Partly this is a matter of regulating the behavior of the mass of citizens. This is accomplished in part through control the institutions which orchestrate how individuals interact with one another. These include political institutions like the Congress, the courts and the law, state and city administrations, and the police, and economic institutions like banks and large corporations. Via these institutions, the elite can manage citizen interaction through the rewards that reinforce correct behavior and punish violating behaviors so that it approximates, even if inadequately, democratic practices. Even more importantly, the elite can exercise over the mass by controlling the discourses that dominate the public sphere. They can thus determine the knowledges and preferences that individuals draw upon as the react to the circumstances of daily life. This cultural domination is secured through the control of the means by which these discourses are dispersed, most importantly the mass media but also the institutions of socialization such as schools and

universities. This enables elites to promulgate the orienting truths and values of democratic culture even if these are transformed into mere slogans rehearsed by citizenry that does not fully understand what they are saying. As importantly, this cultural control also allows democratic elites to exclude and delegitimize contrary or system threatening discourses (as stupid or evil) and derogate those who advocate them (as fanatics, ignorant, unbalanced and generally ‘deplorable’). Again the citizenry will not really understand why these alternative discourses are misguided or wrong, but they will nonetheless reject them. In these ways, democratic elites can manipulate the mass of citizens so that they mimic, even if inadequately, democratic understandings and practices. In those cases where this manipulation fails, the recalcitrant portion of the citizenry can at least be marginalized and made ineffectual. Thus even though democracy is burdened by an inadequate citizenry, the elite’s exercise of power can sustain the democratic system and hold potentially attractive alternatives, such as right wing populism, at bay.^{iv}

Why democracy is faltering now: Undermined by its own success

Understanding both the structural weakness of democratic systems and the conditions of their persistence, we can now finally address our central question: Why are democracies are faltering now in the face of the challenge of a right wing populism alternative? As noted at the outset, political scientists and sociologists have suggested a number of the changing conditions of everyday life in the western democracies which may be contributing to this state of affairs. They point to economic decline, growing economic inequality and changing demographics as trends that have, in the eyes of the people, undermined the legitimacy of elites and with them, the institutions they run and the vision of economic, social and political life they advocate. I think these factors are influential, but their effects must be understood as symptoms of the underlying structural condition I have tried to describe. Emerging in the context of a structural strong system of governance, these destabilizing fluctuations in its ability to deliver specific outcomes would not produce threats to the system itself. A truly democratic citizenry would naturally regard the aforementioned developments as important problems to be addressed, but in a manner that is consistent with democratic understandings and practices. Alternatively, even where the citizenry is inadequately democratic, an authoritative and powerful democratic elite would be able to control people’s perceptions of those problems and the range of possible ways of dealing with them so that particular politicians or policies are rejected, rather than system of democratic governance. Indeed in strong, well established democracies like the US, this has historically been the case. So earlier, even more severe economic declines, equivalent levels of economic inequality and periods of large scale immigration did not threaten the viability of democracy itself.

In the last several decades, something more basic or fundamental seems to be transpiring. In the advanced industrialized societies of the west and particularly in the US, the structural forces of modernity described earlier, such as those of the economy, science, technology and globalization along with that of democratic governance itself, have that have been increasingly

successful in supplanting more traditional forms of organizing everyday social life. This has entailed an ever greater dismantling of hierarchical structures and a de-legitimation of conventional authority. One crucial result of this ongoing process is the increasingly loss of elite control over the public sphere.

Partly the diminution of elite cultural power is a practical matter of dismantling of centralized technologies of mass communication that facilitated the elite control of the messages that circulated in the public sphere. Structured by capitalist and democratic forces, the internet, the computer and the smartphone have been developed in ways that give individuals both an increasing range of choices and a greater ability to express preferences in a very public way. Now an alienated, uneducated, working class ranch hand living in east Texas has access not only to the information disseminated by the major television channels or the national newspapers controlled by elites, but also to a myriad of smaller, more varied and less culturally sanctioned sources. He or she is now able to choose which messages he or she wants to receive. Similarly that 'ordinary' American, who once had very little political voice, is now able to broadcast his or her beliefs about events and policies as widely as any senior correspondent for the New York Times or Yale professor of economics, politics or environmental science. With this democratization of the media whereby the mass communicates in the public sphere, elites have become less able to control the message that is disseminated and therefore less able to insure the dominance of democratic views and the exclusion of anti-democratic alternatives.

This loss elite control is also a cultural matter, one which reflects how structures of modern life have diminished the legitimacy of those who have been conventionally allocated authority in the various spheres of everyday life. From the venues of formal governance to the market, the workplace, schools, universities and the home, power hierarchies have been increasingly flattened and communicative practices of command has increasingly given way to negotiation and collaboration. The institutionally conferred authority of political leaders, employers, bosses, experts, teachers, and even parents has been undermined. In the process, expression has become increasingly free and all voices have been increasingly equalized. Thus not only is our east Texan able to broadcast his beliefs as widely as those of senior journalists and professors, his views have an equal claim to validity as his more institutionally advantaged counterparts.

Thus there is a confluence of similar and mutual reinforcing forces that are moving political life in the same direction. The ever greater structural penetration of everyday life by the forces of capitalist markets, democratic politics and globalization have made the complexities of social life and the necessity of individuals to rely on themselves when negotiating those complexities increasingly apparent. Given their inadequate cognitive and emotional abilities to participate in the ways required, the people living in this freer, more equal, more culturally diverse world are left more confused, directionless, alone and insecure. They feel a commensurately increasing need for an authoritative definition of the world and themselves and

authoritative direction of how they must act to secure their place, as individuals and a people, in that world.

At the same time, that this need for authoritative direction is heightened, the ability of democratic elites to provide the requisite direction is being diminished. The messages they offer regarding democratic understandings and practices are not, in themselves, compelling. Partly this is because this vision, even when reformulated in the simpler more concrete terms that people can better understand, is fundamentally incompatible with the way in which most citizens think and feel. The message offered simply does not resonate with the natural abilities and inclinations of those intended to accept it. At the same time, the ability of the ability to compel such an acceptance is being diminished. The changing technological structure of communicative technologies has made it practically more difficult for the elites to exercise the control over the messages that circulate widely in the public sphere. They can no longer insure the predominance of their message and the exclusion of alternatives. Moreover in this more open playing field there has been a flattening of conventional authority and a commensurate equalizing of influence. Thus the democratic elite have progressively less ability simply, by virtue of their position or expertise, to confer legitimacy on their truths, values and practices they advocate.

In sum, the ever more democratic conditions of everyday life and the ever more democratic structuring of the public sphere, has undermined the essentially undemocratic power and authority of democratic elites to manage the structural weakness of democratic governance, a citizenry that lacks the cognitive and emotional capacities to think, feel and act in ways required. Instead in the increasingly open, free and equal sphere of public life characteristic of the contemporary western democracies like the United States, democratic elites are forced to compete with opponents, most significantly right wing populists, who offer a message that is intrinsically more comprehensible and satisfying to a recipient public hungry for meaning, security and direction. The probable result is clear. In this ever more democratic context, the authoritarian, nationalist vision of the right wing populist is likely to triumph. In this sense, democracy seems poised, as it ever is, to devour itself.

Post mortem

Considering the current conditions and trajectory of democratic politics, our conclusion is clear. Even, or perhaps particularly in well-established democracies like the United States, democratic governance will continue its inexorable decline and will eventually fail. The alternative that will supersede democracy, right wing populism, is also clear. It offers the understandings the people can readily comprehend, the values they can readily appreciate and the direction of speech and action they can readily follow. This triumph of right wing populism over democracy was averted in early 20th century because of a felicitous combination of a circumstantial distribution of power between nations and, ironically, the insufficiently democratized way of life of any one of them. However such a happy result is unlikely now

To conclude, we can ask if this trajectory and the promised results are inevitable. I think the answer is probably yes. However there is another possibility, if an unlikely one. Before it is too late, the democracies might directly address their own critical vulnerability, the inadequacy of their citizens. For reasons outlined in this chapter, the Madisonian strategy of managing inadequate citizens with less democratic, more republican institutions is no longer a viable option. The alternative is to create the citizenry that has the cognitive and emotional capacities democracy requires. This would entail a massive educational initiative, one that would have to be premised on the recognizing the dramatic failure of prior efforts along these line. Perhaps in this way, democratic forms of governance may yet prevail.

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i It is an approach that builds on the sociologies of Jurgen Habermas (1984) and Anthony Giddens (1984), the pragmatic social psychology of G.H. Mead (1934) and the developmental psychologies of Jean Piaget (1970) and L.S. Vygotsky (1978).

ii This conception of structures not only as being realized pragmatically and thus vulnerable to and shaped by the nature of what people actually do and say is similar to Giddens' conception of the 'duality of structuration' (1984) when speaking of social structures or by Piaget (1970) conception of reflexive abstraction when speaking of cognitive structures.

iii Perhaps the one significant exception is the research on racism. But even here there is little consideration of the broader ramifications for an assessment of the basic competence of democratic citizens.

iv