Routledge Handbook of
Global Populism

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Global populism

Histories, trajectories, problems, and challenges

Carlos de la Torre

As the different chapters of this book illustrate, by invoking the will of the people, populists have challenged the power of elites in Asia, Africa, the Americas, the Middle East, and Europe. In some regions like Latin America, they have governed in different populist waves since the 1930s and 40s until the present. In Africa, Asia, and the Middle East a first generation of populists linked to anti-colonial struggles dominated their postcolonial histories, and using elections a new generation of populists assumed power in several nations of these regions. What is new, perhaps, is that populists are in power not only in fragile democracies in the global south, but with Donald Trump's election also in the cradle of liberal democracy, the United States. Populist parties are becoming stronger in consolidated European democracies, and at the time of writing this chapter are in power in Italy, Hungary, Greece, and Poland.

Pundits and scholars responded to what they named the surge of populism with fear or hope. For some populism is the biggest threat to democracy, and even to the foundations of the project of modernity based on pluralism and reason. For others populism represents a democratizing response to the rule of technocratic global elites that have kidnapped the will of the majorities. The different chapters in this book take very seriously the populist diagnosis of the deficits of real existing democracies in the north and in the global south. When seeking power, populists politicize issues and point to problems that need to be addressed such as inequalities, the loss of national sovereignty to globalization, or the rule of unresponsive political elites. Yet populist solutions tend to be problematic, simplistic, and in most instances, instead of leading to better forms of democracy, their outcomes were authoritarian. The different chapters in this book illustrate how the populist playbook of concentrating power in the hands of the president, using the legal system instrumentally to punish critics, and attacking the media and civil society led to hybrid regimes in Zambia, Turkey, Hungary, Venezuela, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Bolivia. Even in more consolidated democracies like Israel, the United States, or Silvio Berlusconi's Italy, populist attacks on the institutional foundations that allow for fundamental freedoms of association and information led to processes of democratic erosion.

This volume illustrates the diversity of populism globally. Populists differ on how they conceptualize the people. This category central to populism, nationalism, and democratic theory is one of the most abused and ambiguous concepts in political theory. It refers to the

Movement leaders, oligarchs, technocrats and autocratic mavericks

Populists in contemporary Asia

Marcus Mietzner

Donald Trump's victory in the United States, the successful Brexit campaign in Great Britain, the coming to power of populist governments in Eastern Europe and the strengthening of radical parties in Western Europe: all of these developments highlight the seemingly unstoppable rise of extreme populism around the world (Inglehart and Norris 2016). In these cases, populists have exploited a widespread sense of frustration among voters with the way contemporary democracies function (Abromeit, Cherston, Marotta and Norman 2016). Promising to destroy the status quo and replace it with a more "people-oriented" system, populists have used both leftist attacks on free trade as well as right-wing ideas of xenophobic isolationism to gain support. But as linear as the rise of populism may appear, a closer look at world regions outside of the US and Europe shows a more nuanced picture. While populism is expanding its influence there too, there are many cases in which populists have failed; have adjusted their policies once in office; or have offered "soft" populism to defeat more hard-line populists. Thus, rather than trying to identify a common, global strand of populism in the wake of Trump and Brexit, it is increasingly important to study differences between the various forms of populism; the successes or failures they record in different societies; the competition between distinct types of populism; and the responses of elites and populations towards populist experiments.

One such world region where types of populism have competed among each other, and where populists have both succeeded and failed, is Asia. In India, for instance, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a classic movement populist, has pushed a Hindu-nationalist agenda, but continued to pursue India's integration into the world economy. In Thailand, the oligarchic yet redistributive populist Thaksin Shinawatra (and his successors) propagated pro-poor policies, but they were overthrown by the established elite. What's more, their populist failure ushered in an era of military-backed authoritarianism – emphasizing that anti-populist forces are often deeply undemocratic themselves. In Indonesia, a "soft", technocratic populist, Joko Widodo, beat an oligarchic-populist hardliner, Prabowo Subianto, in the 2014 elections, only to find himself challenged by new forms of popular mobilization from Islamic conservative groups. In the

Philippines, the autocratic populist Rodrigo Duterte came to power in 2016 and immediately launched a brutal campaign of extra-judicial killings against small-scale drug-pushers. Bragging that he had pushed suspects out of helicopters and would do it again, Duterte carefully cultivated his image as "the punisher". But while many world leaders were horrified, Duterte commanded high approval ratings from ordinary citizens, and he even enjoyed considerable support among reformers who viewed him as the only chance to destroy the country's dominant network of land-owning family clans. Hence, the story of populism in Asia is a complex one: it is marked by chauvinism and pragmatism; successes and defeats; inter-populist struggles as well as contests between populists and their democratic and non-democratic adversaries.

This chapter reviews the facets of populist experiences in Asia, and explores what they tell us about the global rise of populism. In doing so, the chapter proceeds in four steps. First, it provides a brief overview of the history of populism in Asia, highlighting the differences between the anti-colonial populists of the 1950s, the developmental populists of the 1960s to 1980s, and today's electoral populists. Second, it introduces the four case studies of India, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, which each represent a distinct type of populism. Third, the discussion documents disagreements among scholars over the interpretation of populism in Asia and its impact; while some view populism as a force of democratic, social renewal that can challenge old power networks, others underline the autocratic tendencies inherent in populism. Again others recognize the reformist potential of populism, but believe that this has been successfully neutralized by the established forces of oligarchy and militarism. In the fourth section, I summarize the insights drawn from the Asian case for the debate on global patterns of populism, arguing that while the entry of "oligarchic populists" into the electoral arena and the escalation of identity politics are common to both Asian populism and its pendants around the world, we need to remain aware of the many shapes populism takes in Asia, as well as its highly heterogeneous outcomes. Very few of these outcomes, however, have been supportive of democratic strengthening, making Asia as much part of a global populism story as of a narrative of universal erosion of democracy. The final section draws key conclusions, and looks ahead to the future of populism in Asia and how to study it.

History: anti-colonial, developmental and electoral populists

Given the hype around Trump's election and other recent populist triumphs, it is tempting to view populism as a relatively new phenomenon, in the West and elsewhere. If parallels between Trump and other periods in world history have been drawn, it is with European and Japanese fascism of the 1930s and 1940s, not with other eras of less extreme forms of populism. But populists have been prominent in many polities of the post-1945 landscape, including in Asia. While they were not called populists at the time, they fulfil many of the criteria this volume has identified as key components of populism. In Asia, most populist post-War leaders emerged from anti-colonial struggles, in which radical rejection of the status quo, demonization of the then ruling elite and appeals to the "ordinary people" were standard elements of nationalist mobilization (Kahin 1952; Hammer 1954). In some cases, the nationalist-populist campaign for independence was ideologically framed within the broader communist concept of defeating capitalism, such as in Vietnam. But although ideological elements were present in some anti-colonial struggles, mostly the notion of a nationalist revolution against foreign occupiers was paramount (Dahm 1969). Indeed, the strategy of popular mobilization through anti-colonial rhetoric became so important to leaders of independence movements that they maintained it after they became state officials themselves in the mid- and late 1940s. Sukarno of Indonesia, for instance, attempted to keep the revolutionary spirit alive through indoctrination and new military conflicts with the Dutch – partly in order to distract from his mismanagement of the economy. For Vietnam's Ho

Chi Minh and his immediate successors, war even became an institutionalized instrument of sustaining the revolution – first against the French, then against the United States, and later against China and Cambodia.

Few of Asia's first generation of post-War populists had to bother with competitive democratic elections. Sukarno had himself declared president for life in 1963, Asia's high-profile communist leaders – Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh – based their rule on one-party control, and pro-Western autocrats such as Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia manipulated elections in order to legitimize their rule. In Burma, the popular nationalist leader Aung San was assassinated three months after the first post-independence election, leading to a series of unstable governments headed by much less charismatic figures. In Malaya and Singapore, a different type of populist leaders rose in the 1950s, partly by successfully engineering elections in their favour (Mizuno and Phongpaichit 2009). Both countries had obtained independence from Britain through negotiations rather than revolutionary struggle, requiring alternative political strategies and narratives to allow pre-independence leaders to hold on to power. The Alliance in Malaya and the People's Action Party in Singapore appealed to ethnic sentiments and promised greater redistributive justice, producing – in the case of Singapore – generous public housing and other social welfare programmes. In addition to massive gerrymandering, these populist programs helped to secure an uninterrupted succession of electoral victories. Of Asia's populist leaders in the early post-War period, only Nehru had to engage in competitive elections, although his Indian National Congress Party easily won all elections between 1952 and 1962.

The longer anti-colonial leaders served as presidents and prime ministers, the less they were able to uphold the image of "fighting the establishment" – the core component of populism. Now the establishment themselves, former independence figures tried to substitute the fight against domestic elites with one against foreign imperialists or internal counter-revolutionaries, but the effectiveness of such campaigns was increasingly limited. At the end, especially those populist, anti-colonial regimes that had poor economic records became vulnerable to counter-populist campaigns by military and other conservative forces. Hence, many of Asia's first-generation populist regimes fell in the 1960s and were replaced by military dictatorships that portrayed themselves as neo-populist in that they too aimed at the destruction of outdated and corrupt systems. Instead of revolutionary rhetoric, they offered developmentalist and industrialist populism (Robison, Hewison and Rodan 1993). In 1961, General Park Chung-Hee ended the democratic experiment of the Second Republic in South Korea, initiating a program of accelerated industrialization. In Indonesia, General Suharto removed Sukarno from office in the mid-1960s, establishing a military regime committed to economic development. In Burma, Ne Win toppled Burma's weak democratic government in 1962, replacing it with a military regime leaning towards Moscow but pragmatic in practice. In all three cases, military governments had come to power as a result of deep dissatisfaction with the incumbent elites (a dissatisfaction aggravated by the military), and promises of creating new institutional orders that many citizens hoped would lead to improvements in their economic conditions. In Indonesia, Suharto signalled this break with the past by calling his regime the "New Order".

The second generation of Asian populists was aware that it was much less genuinely popular than the first. The first-generation populists had acquired their charisma in painful struggles against colonial rule, with long prison terms and/or involvement in military combat equipping them with authenticity and a sense of shared suffering. By contrast, the second-generation populists were rather technocratic military leaders without much personal charisma, making them much more reliant on economic performance, repression and state-managed popularity than their predecessors. Thus, actual economic redistribution – or at least a visible rise in public prosperity – was essential for the sustainability of their populist contract with the citizenry. In

the case of South Korea and Indonesia, significant economic development took place between the 1960s and 1990s, allowing the countries' military regimes to rule with at least tacit support of the majority of the population (Hill 2000; Lie 1998). Critical dissidents, however, were harshly repressed. In the case of Burma, economic development was much more limited, forcing the regime to resort to repression as its primary mode of operation. And although Park and Suharto knew of their charismatic shortcomings – or precisely because of them – they allowed their aides to build a cult of personality around them, which sat oddly with their dry personalities. Suharto's assistants gave him the title of "father of development" and put his picture on bank notes, while Park's "image on posters and paintings [was] displayed dynamically at marches and stadium gatherings" (Winstanley-Chesters and Ter Molen 2015: 18). Ne Win, on the other hand, tried to create the mystical image of a withdrawn and reclusive leader – an image that subsequent junta leaders in Burma copied.

A number of factors put an end to Asia's second-generation, developmentalist populists. First was the "populist's dilemma" that had already brought down the first generation of populists: namely, that after decades of ruling themselves, they no longer could credibly claim to take on the establishment. As the first generation, the second generation of populists tried to substitute "the elite" with other enemies (communists, Islamists, separatists and liberals), but this campaign began to wear off too. Second, the social transformation generated by economic development had swelled the ranks of a more critical middle class, which viewed authoritarian government as increasingly obsolete – South Korea's democratization in the late 1980s and early 1990s was the first product of this trend (Oh 1999). Third, the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 and 1998 destroyed the residual rationale of the military developmentalism initiated in the 1960s. In Indonesia and Thailand, pro-military governments had to leave after the economic collapse terminated their contract with the population. For all the prosperity the regimes had created in their decades of repressive rule, the unprecedented meltdown of their economies made their positions untenable (not in Burma, however, where the military clung on to power for another two decades). And fourth, there was the seemingly unstoppable march of democracy – in addition to South Korea, the Philippines had become democratic in 1986, Pakistan (temporarily) in 1988, Mongolia and Taiwan in the mid-1990s, Thailand in the late 1990s, and Indonesia in 1998. With this, Asian populists now had to compete in democratic elections – unlike most of their first- and second-generation predecessors.

Hence, with the advent of the third generation of Asian populists in the late 1990s, the focus of populist mobilization has shifted to the electoral arena – and so have populism studies. Scholars have asked: how do populists gain support without the charisma attached to an independence struggle, or a repressive apparatus enforcing loyalty vis-à-vis the incumbent leader? What kinds of populists have run for office, which ones have succeeded, and why? Broadly, there have been four types of contemporary populists in Asia. First, there are what Levitsky and Loxton (2013: 10) identified as "movement populists"; i.e. populists who emerge from groups or parties with strong grassroots ties and a social, cultural and/or ideological agenda. Second, "maverick populists" are those from within the elite who then lament its decay and promise to destroy it (Levitsky and Loxton 2013: 10). A prominent sub-group of this category are the "oligarchic populists" (Aspinall 2015). These are rich elites who appeal to the poor by proclaiming that it needs an oligarch to defeat oligarchy from within. Third, "technocratic" populists offer a mild version of anti-establishment criticism, often mixed with references to their own lower-class background (Mietzner 2015). Their aim, however, is not the destruction of "the system", but its improvement. And finally, there are openly autocratic populists who carefully craft strongman reputations and commit systematic violations of existing rules to cement that image. The following section explores four Asian case studies,

each representing one populism type, and discusses how they have fared in the context of growing populism around the world.

Asia's populists and their approaches: four case studies

Asia's third-generation populists began to increase their influence in the late 1990s and early 2000s, but a significant spike took place in the mid-2010s, in concert with other successful populist campaigns in the Americas and Europe. One of the most prominent Asian populists in that latter period has been India's Modi, who came to power in 2014. A classic movement populist, he rose through the ranks of the Hindu-nationalist organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its political arm, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). His lower-class upbringing (he belongs to what the Indian government classifies as "other backward class") allowed him to build an image not only as a religious activist, but as a "man of the people" interested in improving public welfare. In 2001, his movement and party leaders appointed him as Chief Minister of Gujarat, where he quickly gained a reputation as a fierce campaigner against Muslim interests. He was accused of sparking the 2002 Gujarat riots by publicly blaming Muslims for an attack on Hindu pilgrims, and by assisting the Hindu side in their counter-attacks. At the end of the riots, the official death toll stood at around 1,000, but others put the number at nearly 2,000 (Human Rights Watch 2012). While his anti-Muslim stance earned him a travel ban by the US, it made him highly popular among the majority of Gujarati voters. Modi won re-election in 2002 (just after the riots), 2007 and 2012. Besides his promotion of Hindu values and groups, he also benefited from strong economic growth in Gujarat during his three terms, averaging above 10 per cent and thus above national growth levels (*The Economist* 2015). In the eyes of many voters, this economic record proved that Modi was not only committed to a pro-Hindu agenda, but also possessed the pragmatism necessary to grow the economy.

For Modi and his movement, the establishment he aimed to challenge and defeat was the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Nehru dynasty that ran it. Between 1947 and 2014, the INC had been in charge of the government for more than 60 years, and if its Prime Ministers were not direct members of the Nehru family, they were their proxies. The RSS believed that the INC betrayed India's Hindu heritage, and it pledged to make the latter its primary concern when in office. For many RSS activists, the contest with the INC was not only political and ideological – it was deeply personal. Modi, for example, had spent time underground during the government of Indira Gandhi in the 1970s, instilling in him a particular sense of disdain for the INC. Subsequently, Modi watched with interest how the BJP gained power in 1998, only to lose it again in 2004 – a loss many blamed on the failure of the BJP to connect with ordinary, rural Indians. The BJP Prime Minister at the time, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, was a poetry-loving intellectual from an upper-caste family, and thus an unlikely representative for an anti-system, populist agenda. It was with this lesson in mind that the RSS and BJP asked Modi to run for Prime Minister in 2014. Vajpayee had been critical of Modi after the Gujarat riots, and he later blamed the riots for his 2004 electoral defeat (*India Today* 2004). But now, apparently, the RSS and BJP boards believed that a more hard-line and religiously polarizing lower-class candidate was needed to remove the INC government from power. And indeed, after a fierce campaign in which Modi advanced an exclusivist Hindu-nationalist program, showcased his lower-class roots and highlighted his economic successes, he became Prime Minister in May 2014.

In office, Modi successfully implemented significant parts of his Hindu-nationalist agenda, including through new education policies at the national and state levels. But in economic terms, Modi found it necessary to periodically switch between policies of market reform and

populist support programs for the poor. After he was criticized in his first two years in office (both by domestic and international observers) for not doing enough to modernize the Indian economy, he suddenly launched a "big bang" initiative against the informal, cash-based economy in November 2016. Without warning, he withdrew all 500 and 1000 Rupee bills, which accounted for 86 per cent of all currency in circulation (Saberin 2016). This move hit the lower classes hard, which felt forced to rapidly move towards electronic banking without the necessary infrastructure being in place. Fearing a backlash, Modi announced new populist measures in a speech in late December 2016, promising more government support for the poor, farmers, women and small businesses. Thus far, Modi's prioritization of Hindu-nationalist issues, anti-Muslim themes and promises of restoring India's old grandeur, in combination with his economic policies that are interchangeably pragmatic and populist, seems to have served him well. In a 2016 poll, 81 per cent of respondents stated that they held a favourable view of Modi; 80 per cent approved of how he ran the economy; and 65 per cent believed that India was on the right track. In the two latter categories, this constituted a 23 and 36 per cent increase respectively over the level of satisfaction under the previous INC government in 2013 (Forbes 2016).

Another of Asia's populists, Thaksin Shinawatra of Thailand, initially recorded similar triumphs, but he eventually fell victim to his own success. To be more precise, his ability to rally the poor behind him triggered an elite backlash, which led to two coups, institutionalized military rule and severe legal, economic and personal repercussions for Thaksin and his family (Funston 2009). A billionaire with vast domestic and international investments, Thaksin belonged to the sub-type of oligarchic populists. He founded his Thai Rak Thai (Thai for Thais, TRT) party in 1998, and went on to win the 2001 elections with a large plurality. Benefitting from a reformist 1997 constitution that strengthened the role of elected governments over the military and the monarchy, Thaksin became the first democratically elected prime minister in Thai history to complete a full term. Essential to this success was his populist appeal to poor voters in the North and Northeast of the country, who traditionally felt neglected by the Bangkok-based elite (McCargo and Pathmanand 2005). To court them, Thaksin initiated a universal healthcare program that became very popular with the poor, and he launched a massive infrastructure program that created jobs and opened access to previously remote areas. He did all that while still decreasing the overall debt-to-GDP ratio, cementing his image as a competent economic manager and generous dispenser of welfare patronage to the poor at the same time. Unsurprisingly, then, he was re-elected in 2005 in a landslide, with the North and North-eastern voters delivering him the votes he needed to succeed.

But instead of consolidating his position, the 2005 election spelled the end of his rule: his pro-military and monarchist adversaries saw their privileges threatened by Thaksin's growing power, and began to mobilize against him (Chachavalpongpun 2014). Following mass demonstrations led by Bangkok elite figures, Thaksin was toppled in a military coup in 2006, and after his sister Yingluck won another election in 2011, she too was overthrown in 2014. Subsequent to the second coup, the military decided not to hand back power to civilians until it had engineered a political order that would keep Thaksin and his family away from power indefinitely. In 2016, therefore, a constitution was passed that installed a fully appointed Senate, with powers to overturn any decision made by an elected government. At the same time, legal machinations put Thaksin into permanent exile and his sister on trial for a subsidy program for rice farmers seen as harmful to the state (she eventually fled the country as well in August 2017). Thus, oligarchic populism failed in Thailand, but it did so because of its unprecedented capacity to mobilize poor voters behind a leader outside of the conventional military and monarchist cliques. The elitist counter-reaction to the populist challenge in Thailand threw the country well behind its

democratic achievements of the 1990s and 2000s, and turned it into one of the world's few remaining military dictatorships, even as the Burmese generals relinquished power in 2015 after their own 60-year rule. This shows that opposition to populist regimes is as likely to come from conservative, anti-democratic forces as from democrats concerned about the authoritarian tendencies of populist rule.

There was, to be sure, significant democratic opposition against Thaksin's rule as well. Like many populists, Thaksin had a strong autocratic streak, which expressed itself in disdain for opponents, dismissive remarks about certain groups (such as the Muslims in the South), and a predilection for heavy-handed policies (such as the extra-judicial killings of drug addicts in 2003). Many voters felt attracted by his strongman attitude, but it also made it impossible for Thaksin to build coalitions with other civilian parties when his government was threatened by the military. Importantly, Thaksin's authoritarian personality traits grew more extreme over time. His 2005 electoral victory in particular confirmed – in his view – his invincibility and indispensability, and he moved to cut the rights of the opposition and democratic freedoms more generally. With this, Thaksin's narrative also became a story of populist self-defeat. Having come to power democratically and with genuinely strong mass support, Thaksin arguably would have had a much better chance of long-term survival (and, indeed, continued success) had he not tried to undermine the democratic system. Of course, Thaksin was not the only populist whose attempts to turn democratic majorities into unlimited authoritarian rule proved damaging to rather than supportive of the overall populist project. Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, for instance, followed a very similar path: after several democratic election victories that made Turkey a much-celebrated model of a functioning Muslim democracy, he tried to personalize his rule, transforming the country into an electoral autocracy marred by political uncertainty, economic decline and incessant security disturbances (Esen and Gumuscu 2016).

In Indonesia, the 2014 elections saw a contest between a Thaksin-style oligarchic populist, Prabowo Subianto, and a much more moderate, technocratic populist, Joko Widodo (or popularly called "Jokowi"). Both tried to exploit widespread public dissatisfaction with the stagnation that had arrested the country under the 10-year rule of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004–14). But they did so with very different methods: Prabowo promised to replace the "rotten" and "corrupt" system with a stronger presidential regime resembling that of the pre-1998 order, while Jokowi highlighted his non-elite background as evidence that he was committed to better pro-poor governance (Mietzner 2015). Jokowi prevailed in the elections, promising to begin a new era of direct popular rule in which the president no longer had to accommodate self-interested elites. But as Jokowi found out very soon, the old elites possessed a number of instruments to curtail Jokowi's presidential powers and frustrate his populist mandate (Muhtadi 2015). It took Jokowi two years to settle into a stable but inconvenient equilibrium with the established elites, and while this strengthened his power, it cut the edges off his populist and reformist plans. Indeed, except for a heavy concentration on infrastructure development, there was little in the policies of the Jokowi government that set it apart from the Yudhoyono administration. Hence, while Jokowi's victory had prevented the rise of an oligarchic populist with authoritarian designs, his own version of softer, technocratic populism was strongly diminished by his need for continued elite accommodation.

To some extent, Jokowi's difficulties in turning his populist campaign platform into government practice were self-inflicted. Despite much pressure, Jokowi resisted proposals to institutionalize his large army of volunteers that had delivered him victory in the elections. The volunteers told him at several occasions in late 2014 that they stood ready to form a pro-Jokowi party, but he refused (Interview with Jokowi, 15 September 2014). Instead, he remained with the party that nominated him, and with which he had a continuously difficult

relationship. Had Jokowi developed his own party, he would have turned into a movement populist, with stronger grassroots support giving him greater control over his own presidential agenda. The implications of Jokowi's decision not to entrench his movement as a power base became especially obvious in November and December 2016, when he faced a challenge from another powerful populist movement: the Islamists. Irritated by Jokowi's high approval ratings (around 70 per cent throughout 2016) and the prospect of him winning a second term, the Islamists – who rejected Jokowi as too secular – started to mobilize extra-parliamentary opposition against him. The concrete trigger was a blasphemy case involving the close Jokowi ally and Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, a Christian Chinese, who was running for re-election. In two demonstrations in November and December 2016, Islamists – supported by other Jokowi opponents – mobilized hundreds of thousands of protesters who demanded the governor's arrest. Shocked by the massive turn-out, Jokowi asked his assistants why nobody had mobilized to defend him. The answer was clear: because of his own decision to not form a party, Jokowi did not possess a movement that could have been used to counter-mobilize against the Islamists. As a result, Jokowi became vulnerable to the growing power of Islamist populism (Mietzner 2017).

In the Philippines, a prototype of an openly autocratic populist came to power in 2016. Rodrigo Duterte had been mayor of the Southern town of Davao, where he gained a reputation for extra-judicial campaigns against violent crime and drug trafficking. In 2009, he stated that "If you are doing an illegal activity in my city ... for as long as I am the mayor, you are a legitimate target of assassination" (*The Independent* 2009). When he ran for president, he promised to apply the same approach to the Philippines, saying that he would dump so many bodies in Manila Bay that the "fish will grow fat" (*New York Times* 2016). Instead of outrage, his remarks earned him growing poll numbers from a population craving for change. He went on to win the elections easily, and his administration immediately launched a campaign against drug addicts and traffickers. Between July 2016, when Duterte took office, and January 2017, 6,223 people were killed in this campaign (Rappler 2016). While Duterte avoided personal responsibility for the killings, he continued to protect – and indeed, encourage – the perpetrators. In December 2016, he responded to a question about the killings by saying that "In Davao, I used to do it personally, just to show to the guys (police) that if I can do it, why can't you?" (*The Guardian* 2016). He also peppered his tough talking with attacks on the West and the UN, which had condemned the killings. And the Philippine citizenry approved: in December 2016, Duterte's job satisfaction rating stood at 86 per cent (*Pulse Asia* 2017).

In addition to the extra-judicial killings, Duterte's autocratic persona was also highlighted by his routine disregard for the separation of powers. In August 2016, he read out – on public television – the names of state officials he suspected of involvement in crimes. None of the persons mentioned had been legally charged, and Duterte said his allegations "might be true or it might not be true" (*The Philippine Star* 2016). Effectively usurping the powers of the judiciary, Duterte demonstrated his disdain for proper legal and political procedure. Moreover, he began to circulate personal rumours against political opponents – for instance, he revealed that the chair of a senate committee charged with investigating the extra-judicial killings had bought a house for a lover, calling her an "immoral woman" and telling her to "hang herself" (*Newsweek* 2016). Without any evidence, he also asserted that she too was involved in the drug trade. The affected senator was arrested soon afterwards. However, it would be short-sighted to reduce Duterte to his self-styled strongman image. One reason why Duterte was not only supported by law-and-order-oriented ordinary citizens but also by a remarkable segment of the country's intellectual elite – including liberal political science professors – was his preparedness to try new approaches to long-neglected political problems. This included trying to make peace with

communist rebels, proposing a federal reorganization of the state, and accelerating the Mindanao peace process (Arugay 2016). He has also expressed support for gay rights (even supporting same-sex marriage) and women's rights. None of this, however, could repair the damage Duterte had done to the Philippine's constitutional fabric by essentially abolishing the principle of a fair trial for everyone.

While the four case studies above demonstrate that the different types of populists in Asia have used diverse approaches and experienced highly heterogeneous outcomes, the scholarly debate on their rule has focused on two main sets of interrelated questions and disagreements. The first of these inquiries is centred on the question of whether populism has led to a decline in democratic quality, or whether – conversely – democratic decline in pre-populist regimes was essential in facilitating the rise of populist agendas. In this regard, the issue of whether strong public approval for populists is an indicator of democratic functionality is especially contested. The second field of examination relates to the effectiveness of populists in challenging the entrenched elite networks and oligarchic dominance that they pledged to overcome. While some authors believe populists had some successes in reducing the power of old elites, others are convinced that the former were simply absorbed by the latter, and that populist, anti-elite rhetoric is only a mask for non-democratic platforms. It is these questions and debates that the following section will now turn to.

Scholarly disputes: how democratic and effective are Asia's populists?

The first major debate on Asian populism, namely that on its democratic quality, has divided scholars and observers into two camps. One school, mostly made up of domestic activists, democracy theorists, comparative political scientists and global democracy indexes, have generally argued that the rise of populism goes hand-in-hand with a decline of democratic quality. Shikha Dalmia (2016), for instance, asked whether "India's Narendra Modi [is] turning into just another thin-skinned, populist despot?" The 2016 Freedom in the World report on India seemed to answer in the affirmative, stating that "threats to freedom of expression increased, including intimidation of and attacks against writers, journalists, academics, and bloggers" (Freedom House 2016). It also noted an "uptick in violence against Muslims." Similarly, Freedom House detected a continuous decline of democratic freedoms under Thaksin's rule between 2001 and 2006, downgrading Thailand from "free" to "partly free" in 2006 "due to a progressive weakening of opposition political parties and a lack of political competitiveness" (Freedom House 2006). Later in that year, Thaksin was overthrown, and the country slipped further into military-dominated authoritarianism. Indonesia was also downgraded from "free" to "partly free" in 2014, when populist campaigns – both secular and Islamist – started to challenge the democratic status quo, and the country did not regain its "free" status after Jokowi's election. In regards to the Philippines, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini called for Duterte's prosecution in December 2016, reflecting the UN's view that the populist Philippines were sliding into lawlessness (Sydney Morning Herald 2016).

But for the opponents of this populism-causes-democratic-crisis argument, the reverse causality is closer to the truth. For these scholars – often in-country academics with a long-term view of its history – populism did not create democratic crisis, but was the attempt to overcome it. As Arugay (2016) commented, "Duterte's electoral mandate comes from the collective rage of Filipinos against the status quo but also from their unshakeable faith that as a catalyst for change, Duterte can provide decisive leadership to curb criminality, inequality, and corruption". Implying that critics of Duterte were preoccupied with the extra-judicial killings

and missed the democratic core of his agenda, Arugay insisted that "of all the candidates in [the 2016] election, only Rodrigo Duterte promised to amend the Constitution to introduce two fundamental institutional changes: federalism and parliamentarism." Thus, for Arugay, democracy was not eroded by Duterte – this was done by his many predecessors. Similarly, Pavin Chachavalpongpun (2016) asserted that the real threat to Thailand's democracy was not primarily Thaksin, "but the traditional elites' persistence in demeaning the democratic process". While "not saying that Thaksin was a role model for democracy", Chachavalpongpun claimed that "he opened up a political space for fairer competition through electoral politics and in the process empowering those marginalised residents [in the North and Northeast]." Thus, Thaksin's populism wasn't designed to destroy democracy – it aimed at saving it from the elites.

Another sub-field in the debate on the democracy-populism nexus is the extent to which strong popular support for the populist is an indication that democracy is functioning. The populism sceptics maintain that the popularity of populists has no relevance for the assessment of their impact on a polity's democratic quality. This is because democracy is not only defined by majority rule; indeed, truly democratic systems are marked by the strength of their constitutional protections for minorities and dissidents (Diamond and Morlino 2004). But the opponents of this view often point to compelling electoral victories of populists, or their strong standing in the polls, as evidence that the people's will – the core of democracy – has been accomplished. Edmund Tayao, for example, highlighted Duterte's democratic legitimacy by stating that "If there's any reason why this president remains popular and supported by many, particularly the ordinary folks, [it] is precisely because this administration has addressed ... the most basic of services that the people expect from the government" (ABS-CBN News 2016). He went on to say that Duterte was likely going to be "one of the very best presidents" of the Philippines. And indeed, the question of how to conceptualize populists who gain a popular mandate in democratic elections with an anti-democratic agenda, and then use autocratic measures while maintaining their high popularity, goes to the heart of democracy theory. Neither theorists nor non-populist, democratic politicians have thus produced a definitive answer.

The second major arena of debate among scholars focusing on Asian populism is the question of just how transformative they have been. Have they succeeded in dismantling the elite networks they promised to take on? Or have the elites, on the contrary, managed to co-opt and/or defeat the populists? The sceptics point out that many Asian populists have either failed to challenge the elites and instead chose easier substitute targets, or have been entirely co-opted by oligarchic forces. In the case of Duterte, Joseph Franco (2016) insisted that his war on drugs was in reality a "war on the poor". Instead of trying to displace oligarchic elites from power, then, he turned against a much easier target many middle-class Filipinos had little sympathy for. Thompson (2016) explained that "Duterte's aggressive campaign has played to the deep resentments of those marginally better off after a couple of decades of solid growth" – and those sentiments were at least as strongly anti-poor as they were anti-oligarchic. Another substitute target was external: his hostile attitude towards the US distracted – like his drug war – from his failure to seriously challenge the Philippine's land-owning clans. Perhaps, this was not surprising given that Duterte himself originates from a powerful political clan. As Isaac and Aceron emphasized,

the Duterte family is closely related to the Duranos and Almendrases, which are two of the most powerful political clans in Cebu province. [Duterte]'s own father, Vicente Duterte, was even at one point mayor of Danao City, before moving to Davao where he served as governor.

Duterte's brother and children also held, and continue to hold, leadership positions in Davao. From this perspective, Duterte has done little to damage "the system" within which his family grew powerful, and neither was he expected to.

A similar argument has been made for Jokowi's failure to dislodge the country's powerful oligarchs. For Jeffrey Winters, this was predictable as Jokowi himself was "yet another manifestation of oligarchic and elite influence". As Winters (2014) argued, Jokowi

did not rise up through the party ranks but instead parachuted in from above, with enormous financial backing from major oligarchs. Combined with an enthusiastic pump-up from the major media, which are overwhelmingly owned by a dozen oligarchs, Jokowi rocketed from complete anonymity into the public consciousness.

Two years into his government, the two leading scholars of the Indonesian oligarchy, Hadiz and Robison (2017: 488), concluded that "rather than being transformative, [Jokowi's and other] populisms are harnessed to the maintenance of oligarchic domination".

Other authors, however, have underlined the transformative potential of populists, even if the evidence for their influence is a major push-back from elites that subsequently terminated the populist project. Hewison (2010: 130) argued that "it remains true that Thaksin has reshaped Thailand's politics. Arguably, his most thorough-going contribution was the embedding of ideas regarding state welfare". Indeed, the fact that Thaksin was eventually overthrown proves, for Hewison (2010: 128), just how strong a challenge he launched to the country's entrenched oligarchy:

the 2006 coup was about opposing the changes Thaksin wanted and preserving the status quo that involved the dominance of the old oligarchy. To take down Thaksin and to overcome the challenge he posed, the old oligarchy had to become more actively politically engaged than it had been for about three decades.

And it did so by mobilizing mass demonstrations against Thaksin, aligning ever more closely with the monarchy, and supporting the military in its anti-Thaksin campaign. From this perspective, the military's attempts to stay in control after the 2014 coup by engineering a new political system is an implicit tribute to the tremendous socio-political change Thaksin unleashed since the early 2000s. With this, Thaksin is arguably the only of Asia's third-generation populists who reshaped his country to an extent that will long outlive both his tenure and his ouster from office.

Asian populists and global populism studies

What then, can populism theorists and comparativists learn from studying populism in Asia? It is important to begin this section with a warning: whatever lessons there are to be drawn from the Asian case studies, the most significant feature of Asian populism remains its diversity. Populists in Asia have come from different backgrounds, belong to specific types, operate in a variety of socio-political and economic country contexts, and have experienced highly heterogeneous outcomes. Thus, it would be dangerous to brush over these differences in order to artificially identify commonalities with the Trump phenomenon and other cases of populist resurgence in the West. Having said that, a number of conclusions can and must be drawn, and some of these relate to the diversity mentioned above. First of all, as the previous section has shown, populists are both respondents to and actors in a broader crisis of

democracy. In other words, trying to identify a strict causality in the democracy-populism nexus means oversimplifying a complex relationship of interdependence. Populists rarely have a chance of rising if the existing democratic polity functions effectively. Deep-seated perceptions of democratic failure or stagnation deliver populists the material they need to succeed. It is also true, however, that most populists not only exploit, but aggravate democratic deficits. In Asia, there has been no case of a populist who improved the quality of democratic participation, civil liberties and other indicators of a democracy's health. Indeed, most polities governed by populists have seen further democratic decline since they took office, the strong popular support they often receive for their anti-democratic behaviour notwithstanding.

Second, there is also little evidence from Asia that populists have succeeded in what they set out to do, and that is replacing the existing "rotten", oligarchy-dominated system with a more people-oriented polity. When running in 2014, Modi pleaded to the voters, "You have given 60 years to [the INC] to rule, I ask only for 60 months. Trust me once. I will be your servant and not ruler" (*The Indian Express* 2014). And while he remained popular half way through his first term, very few observers – and even sympathizers – would claim that he has substantively changed the way Indian politics, society and economy work. Similarly, with the world fixated on Duterte's bellicose rhetoric, few have realized that he did little to modernize the foundations of the Philippine polity. For his part, Indonesia's Jokowi found himself having to make compromises with the elite he had promised to ignore, and while Thaksin initially had significant successes in reducing the powers of the oligarchy, military and monarchy, their combined resistance not only removed him, but made the established elite stronger than ever before.

Third, the Asian cases deliver significant insights into what triggers and drives populist challenges – and what doesn't. For instance, contrary to widespread claims (Resnick 2013), none of the Asian cases can confirm that economic decline and increasing poverty are important preconditions for populist campaigns. Indeed, India, Indonesia and the Philippines all had strong GDP growth and declining poverty before populist challengers succeeded, while Thailand had recovered from its 1997 meltdown when Thaksin took over in 2001. Sizeable middle classes had emerged as a result of the growth under pre-populist regimes, demanding that the elites that had run the latter give up their privileges. There was also concern in those middle classes over the increasing inequality that GDP growth had produced. Thus, rather than economic decline, it was the side effects of economic growth that facilitated the rise of third-generation populists in Asia. By contrast, the role of religious and other sectarian sentiments in populist campaigns is less clear. In India, this role was prominent, with Modi appealing to fears that Hinduism was under threat from Muslims, globalization and Indian secularists. In Indonesia, however, Jokowi won without using sectarian prejudices – indeed, he had to fend off a religious smear campaign against himself. Duterte not only refrained from exploiting religious themes but made a point of insulting the Catholic Church. Thaksin, for his part, used anti-Muslim sentiments as a marginal issue. The same diversity was visible in the role of anti-foreign or xenophobic rhetoric – which is often a hallmark of populist campaigns elsewhere (Schedler 1996). While Modi has been known for his anti-Pakistan stance, he was careful not to offend China, Russia or the West. Jokowi rejected any anti-foreign themes, while Thaksin was a declared friend of the US. Duterte, on the other hand, drew much of his strongman image from his attacks on Washington.

Finally, it is also essential to keep in mind that some of Asia's first- and second-generation populist regimes remain in power today. Given that they have been in government for decades and no longer can present themselves as "anti-system", their "populism" label has expired. But the authoritarian regimes of China, Vietnam and Singapore ascended during the wave of anti-colonial populism in the 1940s and 1950s, and their current economic success – in addition to their

effective repressive apparatuses – has allowed them to withstand pressures for democratic change. As non-democracies, the surviving populist states of the first and second generation have not had experience with third-generation populism, which occurs competitively in the electoral arena rather than through the statism of autocratic polities. Thus, if there is one overall conclusion to be extrapolated from the historic and contemporary Asian experience with populism, it is this: while old populist regimes have shielded themselves from democratic reform pressure, the new ones have taken advantage of and deepened the crisis of democratic polities created during the third wave of democratization. The chances for a fourth, post-populism wave of democratization are currently limited at best – much more limited, it seems, than the possibility of a fourth generation of populists emerging that no longer competes in free and fair elections, but abolishes them.

Conclusion and outlook

This chapter has introduced four different types of populists who have left their mark on Asia's contemporary electoral politics. Whether movement-based, maverick/oligarchic, technocratic or openly autocratic populists, they have promised to dismantle the status quo and institute a more people-oriented style of governance. Few of them have succeeded in doing so, however, despite high levels of public approval for their often brazen rhetoric and manoeuvres. Instead, traditional democratic liberties have declined in populist regimes, aggravating the crisis of democracy that helped populists to gain power in the first place. It is this nexus between democratic crisis and populism that deserves more scholarly attention in the years to come. Populists deepen democratic deficits, but they wouldn't emerge without such deficits enabling their rise. In the past, scholars have focused on populist challenges in new, third-wave democracies in Latin America, South-Eastern Europe or – as in this chapter – Asia. Alternatively, they have discussed how left- or right-wing parties have occupied political space at the margins of Western Europe's liberal democracies. But Trump's victory in the US has highlighted that populists can not only win in still developing democracies or gain parliamentary seats in liberal ones, but that they can take full control in the world's oldest democratic systems. In the case of Asia, this means taking a fresh look at the few liberal democracies in the region – such as Japan, South Korea or Taiwan – and analyse the extent to which crises in public confidence towards democracy could make them vulnerable to populist take-overs in the future. And for populism studies based in the liberal democracies of the Americas, Europe and Oceania, this means better understanding why people increasingly turn away from the system that, despite its flaws, had uncritically been described as the best and only game in town.

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Populism in the Middle East

Dani Filc

1. Introduction

Populism in the Middle East has a relatively long history. Examples in the twentieth century are Nasser's populism in Egypt (Hibbard and Layton 2010; Di Tella 1997; Nedelcu 2014), Kemalism in Turkey (Karpas 1963; Keli 1980; Di Tella 1997), and Menahem Begin's Likud party in Israel (Filc 2006, 2010; Shapiro 1991, 1996). Populism in the Middle East, though, does not only belong to the mid-twentieth century, but is still a significant presence in countries such as Egypt, Iran, Israel, and Turkey (Hadiz 2016). The present chapter will discuss populism in the last three countries, each one presenting different variants and developments of the populist phenomenon.

While there is a relatively broad agreement among scholars in characterizing political phenomena such as Khomeinism, the Turkish AKP, or the Israeli Likud as populist, the term is often used without a clear definition, as if its use was non-controversial. However, populism has been understood as an ideology, a discursive strategy, an economic approach, a mobilization strategy, or a political style; thus, in order to allow for a regional analysis of the phenomenon, we must make clear how the term is understood and used. Lately, Cass Mudde's definition of populism as a thin ideology that considers society as separated into two antagonist groups – the pure people and the corrupted elites, and that politics must be an expression of the people's general will (Mudde 2007) – has been widely accepted and has based comparative and empirical research on populism. Although it has been used in order to analyze Latin-American populism, Mudde's definition was developed in the research of the European populist radical right. When analyzing countries with non-liberal democracies, or limited democracies, this definition fails to distinguish between any democratic movement, and populist ones (Ochoa Espejo 2011). Thus, in addressing populism in the Middle East, I propose to adopt a more complex definition of the term, combining Mudde's and Laclau's (2005) contributions to the definition of populism with insights from political sociology which analyze populism as a political practice by which a group undergoes a process of transformation by which it becomes an active collective political subject (Jansen 2011). For Jansen populism is a political project, defined as "a concerted and sustained set of ... mobilizational and discursive practices – that maintains a degree of enduring coherence, both in terms of its rhetorical underpinnings and its ongoing enactment" (2011: