DIRECT DEMOCRACY AND THE RISE OF POPULISM IN SWITZERLAND

Khalimat Rachida Benazir*

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4766-9185

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Abstract

In recent years, the European political landscape has been marked by the emergence of parties that defy the usual system, with considerable success. Observers have described this new movement using categories or labels such as "far-right," "right-wing political parties," "radical right," "populism," or "national populism." This study aims to scrutinize direct democracy and to understand the phenomenon of populism in the Swiss context. In the recent history of the oldest democracy in Europe, the homeland of direct democracy, spared by fascist and Nazi dictatorial regimes during the 1930s, far-right or populist movements and parties existed. But, it is during the 1960s and 1970s that real signs of intolerance and calls for authoritarianism rise. In the 1990s, however, the defense of national identity and neutrality, the fear of foreigners, and the criticism of the ruling elites became sociopolitical facts in Switzerland that would bring about a remarkable change in political balances.

Keywords: direct democracy, populism, populist parties, far-right, referendum.

Özet

Son yıllarda, Avrupa siyasi manzarası, olağan sisteme meydan okuyan partilerin ortaya çıkmasından etkilenmiştir. Gözlemciler bu yeni hareketi "çok sağ", "sağ kanat siyasi partiler", "radikal sağ", "popülizm" veya "ulusal popülizm" gibi kategorileri veya etiketleri kullanarak tanımladılar. Bu çalışma, İsviçre'deki demokrasinin şeklini incelemeyi ve özellikle İsviçre bağlamında popülizm olgusunu anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Yakın tarihte, "Avrupa'daki en eski demokrasi" tarihinde, 1930'larda faşist ve Nazi diktatörlük rejimlerinden, "aşırı sağ" veya "popülist" hareketlerden ve partilerden oluşan "doğrudan demokrasinin vatanı" dır. Ancak, 1960'larda ve 1970'lerde, gerçek hoşgörüsüzlük belirtileri ortaya çıkmış ve otoriterlik yükselmiştir. Ancak 1990'larda, ulusal kimliğin ve tarafsızlığın savunulması, yabancı korkusu ve yönetici seçkinlerin eleştirilmesi, İsviçre'de siyasi dengelerde önemli değişikler getirecek sosyopolitik olgular haline gelmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: doğrudan demokrasi, popülizm, popülist partiler, aşırı sağ, referandum.

* PhD Student at Kocaeli University International Relations Department, benazir903@gmail.com

Introduction

Democracy is a system of government in which the people choose their representatives through elections. The specificity of a democratic system is that the governed are supposed to be at the same time rulers, associated with the main decisions involving the life of the city. Democratic systems are supposed to act in the interest of the people because the people are both subject and sovereign. Indeed, there are many types of democracy, and their diverse practices produce a similarly varied set of effects. The specific form of democracy is contingent upon a country's socio-economic conditions as well as its entrenched state structures and policy practices (Schmitter & Karl, 1991: 103). Modern political democracy is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives (Schmitter & Karl, 1991: 103). This definition is restrictive. Direct democracy is a form of democracy in which the people decide on particular political issues (Coppedge et al., 2011: 247–267). In terms of practicing direct democracy, Switzerland is undeniably the best example. More than a third of the popular national votes organized in the world took place in Switzerland. Direct democracy in Switzerland is the result of a very particular political situation, marked by the federal break-up of the country. Bruno and Nadja argue that the example of Switzerland shows what must be the subject of particular care when citizens become important actors in the political arena (Bruno Kaufmann et al., 2010: 5-7). In his book Direct Democracy in Switzerland, Fossedal shows how Switzerland handles every political question and focuses on the shift between representative and direct democracy (Fossedal, 2002). Today, in most countries, it seems more like populism. Everywhere, discussions on identity are on the rise. Democracy is under pressure all around the world with the emergence of authoritarian populists. Despite its direct democracy, Switzerland is no exception and is experiencing a rise in populism. The main question is whether the emergence of populism is a threat to direct democracy culture and practices in Switzerland. We argue that everything depends on how one defines populism. Our work revolves around two articulations. We will study Switzerland as an example of direct democracy in the first part, and in the second part, we will examine the rise of populism and its reflections in this country.

I- Overview of Direct Democracy and the Case of Switzerland

A-Direct Democracy Practices

Democracy indicates an involvement of the people in the functioning of their government. Democratic practices involve citizens more in political and institutional decision-making. In the literature, direct democracy goes hand in hand with the inclusion of all and popular initiatives. There are generally four mechanisms of direct democracy: referendums, citizens' initiatives, agenda initiatives, and recall. Referendums are procedures that give the electorate a direct vote on a specific political, constitutional or legislative issue. Referendums take place when a governing body or similar authority decides to call for a vote on a particular issue or when such a vote is required by law under the terms of a constitution or other binding legal arrangement. Citizens' initiatives allow the electorate to vote on a political, constitutional, or legislative measure proposed by several citizens and not by a government, legislature, or other political authority. To bring an issue to a vote, the proponents of the measure must gather enough signatures in support of it as the law under which the initiative is brought forward requires. Agenda initiatives are procedures by which citizens can organize to place a particular issue on the agenda of a parliament or legislative assembly. As with citizens' initiatives, a minimum number of signatures is generally specified by law for the initiative to be brought forward to the legislature. Unlike the procedure followed for citizens' initiatives, no popular vote takes place when an agenda initiative is brought forward. As for the recall, the procedures allow the electorate to vote on whether to end the term of office of an elected official if enough signatures in support of a recall vote are collected. Although the process of recall is often similar to that of citizens' initiatives, recall deals only with the question of removal of a person from public office, and the outcome is therefore always binding (International IDEA, 2008:10).

According to Gendzel, The federated states of the United States have equipped themselves with the mechanisms of initiative, referendum, and recall from 1898 (Gendzel, 2013:1). In California, the mechanisms of direct democracy were introduced in the Constitution of 1911 (Gendzel, 2013:3). In Italy, the legislative initiative enshrined in article 71 of the 1947 Constitution, the consultative constitutional referendum, and above all, the legislative referendum repealing article 75 is all considered to be manifestations of direct democracy (Baudoin, 2013:2). In Germany, a limited form of direct

democracy already existed at the Bavarian state level in the 1990s. Citizens could launch legislative initiatives and force a referendum on them. However, the threshold required to use this system was exceptionally high (SWI). Given that each experience is rooted in a specific national history, what about the Swiss experience?

Switzerland, described as a "witness democracy" in 1948 by André Siegfried, has practiced direct citizen participation since the first half of the 19th century at both the federal and local levels (Giraux, 2013:1). Already in the social contract, Jean Jacques Rousseau speaks of a system in Switzerland as an ideal state alluding to the Landsgemeinden. Indeed, Switzerland put in place the first instruments of direct democracy in the 19th century (Rousseau, 1965). In 1994 Kobach underlines that Switzerland is the only nation in the world where political life really revolves around the referendum. This country, with 6.5 million political leaders fleeing popularity, whose division of executive authority among the seven members of its Federal Council, furthermore discourages politicians from putting forward their personality. The great political moments of modern Switzerland did not occur in the wake of daring statesmen but in the national debates which led the masses to elections to decide the future of their country (Kobach, 1994:98). Swiss democracy is seen by many as the best example of direct democracy in the world. This model of democracy has its roots in the past.

B-The Historical Origins of Swiss Direct Democracy

Direct democracy in Switzerland has a long history. The mountain communities of central Switzerland governed by popular assemblies, or Landsgemeinden and urban communities like Zurich or Lucerne, which formed medieval Switzerland, had developed since the thirteenth-century means of dialogue guaranteeing their independence against the greed of the Habsburgs and the House of Savoy, the two great regional powers of the time. Not that wars were absent, but the Confederates learned to seal compromises, despite their heterogeneity, to prevent their weakness from placing them at the mercy of foreign ambitions. In the 1860s, the left-wing of the radical movement, which created so-called modern Switzerland in 1848, polished these tools while keeping in mind the ideal of the Landsgemeinde but adapted to a changing society. The role of Parliament has never been disputed. The referendum, which allows opposing a law passed by the Parliament, is adopted at the national level in 1874 and the popular initiative, which allows the people to propose a partial modification of the Federal Constitution, in 1891. After 1891, direct democracy was further extended. The referendum

on international treaties was introduced in 1921 and extended in 1977 and 2003. It allows citizens to be involved in decisions on foreign policy (Beramendi et al., 2008: 26).

The invention of modern direct democracy, the right of citizens to participate in the process of political decision, and the possibility for them to have the last word, date back to the French Revolution. After the deposition by the king in 1792, the Marquis de Condorcet, representative of the Enlightenment and revolutionary, was elected protractor of a national constitutive convention (Kaufmann, 2019). It includes not only the constitutional referendum mandatory for control purposes but also the right of progressive initiative of citizens. Doomed to fail in France, the idea of Condorcet, fortunately, found the fertile ground a little further east, in Switzerland. The French Revolution, which entered Switzerland at the same time as the armies of the Directory in 1798, brought the ideals of freedom and equality and overthrew the old Swiss regime. Then Bonaparte reorganized Switzerland in 1803, respecting the characteristics of each canton. In centralized Switzerland, built on the republican model in 1798, he substitutes a restored Switzerland in his ancestral federalism, where each canton organizes itself as it sees fit and even if Switzerland becomes a satellite of France (Kaufmann, 2019).

From 1830, popular rights will be enshrined in the constitutions of almost all the cantons of the Confederation before imposing themselves at the federal level. In addition to the decentralized nature of power in Switzerland, another element has also contributed to the faster spread of direct democracy and its gradual introduction to all levels of government: assembly democracy. This original form of direct democracy was already practiced in the Middle Ages in many Swiss cantons and cities (Beramendi et al., 2008: 26). Today it continues in the form of communal assemblies and the cantons of Glarus and Appenzell Innerrhoden of Landsgemeinde (Kaufmann, 2019). Most western countries have representative systems. Switzerland is a rare example of a country with instruments of direct democracy at the levels of the municipalities, cantons, and federal state. In this system, citizens have more power than they have in a representative democracy. So let's see how this system is functioning today and what its critics are.

C-Functioning and Criticism of Switzerland's Direct Democracy

Switzerland has a unique system of direct democracy that allows any group to launch an initiative to add an amendment to the constitution or to challenge a federal law in a referendum. A national vote has to be held if a sufficient

number of voters demand it with their signatures. This system has enabled fringe groups to take their pet issues directly to voters, bypassing the parliamentary process. It also has forced parliament to work out balanced compromise legislation that can withstand a referendum (Cultures Contexts, 2017). The modernity of Swiss direct democracy is also reflected in the mode of participation in popular voting. It is thus possible to decide several weeks already before the polling day. Today, over 90% of the votes are expressed by mail or electronically. As a result, the few polling stations that the country still counts are often virtually deserted on poll Sunday (The Local, 2018).

Swiss referendums are compulsory at all levels. The compulsory referendum was introduced in 1848. For any amendment to the constitution, the government is obliged to call for a referendum, as well as for the accession of Switzerland to international organizations and urgent laws, for which the optional referendum is not valid. The optional referendum dates back to 1874. If 50,000 citizens give their signatures within 100 days of the official publication of parliamentary law, they can force a referendum on that law. Originally, this did not apply to laws that parliament had declared urgent. But when parliament began to abuse this possibility and began to declare all types of laws urgent, a referendum determined that urgent laws could come into force immediately but that they always had to be submitted to a subsequent review. The popular majority is enough for the law to be ratified. For the popular initiative, which will lead to a change in the constitution, 100,000 signatures are needed (The Local, 2018). People and cantons majority are necessary for ratification or adoption. Composed of two chambers of people and cantons, the Federal Parliament needs to submit the proposition to a referendum to apply the new constitutional norm, if necessary, by enacting a law. The procedures are clear; that is why popular votes lead to real decisions that can sometimes be difficult to apply (Kuenzi and Bondolfi, 2018). The parliament supports the process by expressing itself at each stage, for example, by being able to propose a counter-project to a popular initiative. Besides, the elected officials have a double role; next to their position as a legislator, they have to defend or oppose a given project in the context of so-called voting campaigns. The cantons, in the fields in which they are competent, also know these popular rights (Kuenzi and Bondolfi, 2018).

The political life of Switzerland is influenced by votes. Recent votes that have impacted the political life of Switzerland are many. Referendums concern various areas and always highlight issues that affect society. In 2005, 54.6 percent of Swiss had voted to join the Schengen area (SWI 2005).

In the 2009 referendum, a constitutional amendment banning the construction of new minarets was approved by 57.5% of the participating voters. This referendum originates back in 2007, when a group of the right of center politicians, mainly from the Swiss People's Party and the Federal Democratic Union, the Egerkinger Committee (Egerkingen Committee), launched a popular federal initiative that sought a constitutional ban on minarets. The minaret at the mosque of the local Turkish cultural association in Wangen bei Olten was the initial motivation for the initiative. (The New York Times, 2009). In 2014, Swiss citizens voted on a military issue. The purchasing of 22 Jas-39 Gripen fighter jets was rejected by the majority (Leone, 2018). In 2018, 55 percent of Swiss voters had rejected a proposal to subsidize farmers who let the horns on their cows and goats grow rather than removing them with a red-hot iron in a procedure that critics say causes pain (DW, 2018). An anecdotal subject, but less than one thinks, at a time when veganism raises the question of the relationship between humans and animals. Another important feature of this vote: his leader, a small farmer in the canton of Graubünden, did not have a penny, and his text has achieved an honorable score in front of the people (DW, 2018). The diversity of the object of votes highlights the importance given to people's voices and choices. Between January 1995 and June 2005, Swiss citizens voted 31 times on 103 federal questions besides many more cantonal and municipal questions (SWI, 2018). From 2017 to 2021, up to 29 popular votes took place in Switzerland (Federal Statistical Office, 2021). Among the latest referendums is the ban on full facial coverings, referred to as the burqa ban in March 2021. It was proposed by the Egerkingen Committee, which also sponsored the successful referendum to ban minaret construction. The referendum is supported by the Swiss People's Party and the Federal Democratic Union of Switzerland. It is opposed by the Green Party of Switzerland, the Green Liberal Party of Switzerland, the Social Democratic Party of Switzerland, The Centre, and FDP.The Liberals (BBC, 2021).

However, there is a belief among the population that certain initiatives like the ban of minarets or the vote against foreign judges can fan the so-called populist sentiments that do not spare Switzerland. For many, some topics are too important to be left to popular arbitrariness. For example, texts dealing with fundamental rights or foreign relations should not be allowed. It is undeniable that some proposals have hints that can be described as populist. But they do have the merit of putting on the table of themes that the classic representative democracies have had too much tendency to conceal. Direct democracy forces the political world to look at issues beyond its

agenda. It must be added that direct democracy has clearly contributed, especially in the inter-war period, which is so conducive to extremism, but also at present to the stability of a Switzerland that is so economically, sociologically, faithfully, and culturally diverse. Another reproach often heard suggests that votes would be manipulated by lobbies or certain political parties. However, direct democracy remains more transparent than representative democracy, and populist attitudes seem to win more ground in Switzerland.

II- The Rise of Populism in Switzerland

A- Concept of Populism

Before addressing right and left-wing populism and analyzing the question of whether populism poses a threat to the direct democracy practiced in Switzerland, it is important to clarify the concept of populism itself. Although most scholars agree that "populism worships the people" (Ionescu and Gellner, 1969:4). There is a challenge to define populism given that the term has been used to describe political movements, parties, ideologies, and leaders. In political science, populism is the idea that society is separated into two groups at odds with one another "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite" (BBC, 2018). In the public debate, there are two dominant interpretations of the term populism, and both are highly charged and negative. In the first, populism refers to the politics of the Stammtisch (the pub), i.e., a highly emotional and simplistic discourse that is directed at the "gut feelings" of the people (Mudde, 2004: 542). In the second meaning, populism is used to describe opportunistic policies to quickly please the people or voters – and so buying their support – rather than looking rationally for the best option (Mudde, 2004: 542).

For Steven Levitsky and James Loxton, full populism combines three characteristics. First, populists mobilize mass support via anti-establishment appeals, positioning themselves in opposition to the entire elite. Second, populists are outsiders, individuals who rise to political prominence from outside the national party system. Third, populists establish a personalistic linkage to voters, circumventing parties and other forms of institutional mediation by vesting a single individual with the task of representing the people (Levitsky and Loxton, 2013: 110). Thus, populism is primarily understood as a specific type of discourse or ideology that claims to express popular interests and demands the will of the people against an establishment or elite, which is seen as undermining them and forestalling their satisfaction.

The Argentine political theorist Ernesto Laclau developed his definition of populism. For Laclau, populism is usually about an emancipatory force that is the essence of politics (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017:3). In this concept of populism, it is believed to mobilize excluded sectors of society against dominant elites and changing the status quo (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017:3). A common approach to defining populism is known as the ideational approach (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017:5). In this definition, the term populism is applied to political groups and individuals who make appeals to "the people" and then contrast this group against "the elite" (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017:6), who are portrayed as corrupt and self-serving. According to the ideational approach, populism is often combined with other ideologies, such as nationalism, liberalism, or socialism. For Laclau, socialism was "the highest form of populism" (March, 2007:65).

After the fall of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc of the early 1990s, there was a rise in populism across much of Central and Eastern Europe (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017:35). In the first multiparty elections in many of these countries, various parties portrayed themselves as representatives of "the people" against the "elite," representing the old governing Marxist-Leninist parties (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017:36). The Czech Civic Forum party, for instance, campaigned on the slogan "Parties are for party members, Civic Forum is for everybody" (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017:37). Many populists in this region claimed that a "real" revolution had not occurred during the transition from Marxist-Leninist to liberal democratic governance in the early 1990s and that it was they who were campaigning for such a change (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017:37). Martin Bull, Director of the European Consortium of Political Research (ECPR), says the emergence of populist parties in Europe could be seen in the early 2000s, but they remained small for several years (BBC, 2018). For him, the swell in support seemed to happen "from 2008 and particularly in 2011, when the banking crisis turned into a sovereign debt crisis" (BBC, 2018). Globalisation, economic pressure, and immigration are the most important factors driving Europe's populism. Populism has taken hold in large parts of Europe and is posing a dangerous threat to democracy. The rise of the populist parties has already changed the social and economic policies pursued by many countries, especially among Europe's rights and in the US, particularly during the Trump presidency. There are different variants of the phenomenon: left-wing populism, which emphasizes the anti-elite element, and right-wing populism, which emphasizes hostility towards foreigners and minorities. Therefore, populist parties can be anywhere on the political scene, including left

parties. However, all forms of populism set "the people" against "the others," but which the others are can vary (Tushnet, 2019: 388). From the left, examples of populists leaders and parties are geographically and historically diverse. In Latin America, the Venezuelan's late President Hugo Chávez was qualified as a left-wing populist leader. In Europe, there is the Podemos party in Spain and Syriza in Greece. However, the strongest populists today are on the right, particularly the radical right. Politicians like Marine Le Pen in France, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, and the ex-president of America, Donald Trump, campaign against immigration and are not only populists but nativists too. Populism as a political movement combines authoritarian, anti-elite, and nativist tendencies in different ways.

Populism has created new tensions between nation-states within Europe and begun to put pressure on democratic institutions in a variety of countries that had once been seen as consolidated democracies (Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 2017). In Switzerland, the phenomenon is manifested by the existence today of several populist parties largely supported by the population. The last decades witnessed a widespread populist attitude in Switzerland.

B-Populists Parties in Switzerland

Political discourses play an important role in shaping social beliefs and preferences. Critical discourse analysis emphasizes that ideas, facts, and knowledge are not static but change as the discourses change (Van Dijk, 1995: 17-27). The critical discourse analysis approach teaches us that politicians have a considerable influence on populations. Politicians' personalities and languages heavily influence the mass. The discourse utilised by populists with charismatic personalities can influence people's perceptions. For example, Berlusconi's party was characterized by a strong reliance on the personal image and charisma of its leader. It has therefore been called a "personality party" (Ginsborg 2005:86). The party's organisation and ideology depended heavily on its leader. Its appeal to voters was based on Berlusconi's personality more than on its ideology or program (Woods, 2014:42-43). In the case of Switzerland, the most influential populists leaders are usually right-wing leaders. As a matter of fact, these last years witnessed the proliferation of right-wing parties in Switzerland. Generally, parties of the radical right are more active on the political scene. Those from the radical left play only a marginal role. The literature on the radical right of Switzerland has so far focused on the Swiss People's Party (Bernhard et al., 2015: 123-137), the Ticino

League (Albertazzi, 2006: 133-139), placing them as the most important radical right political parties in Switzerland. The Geneva Citizens' Movement is also among the influential.

As the ground zero of postwar European populism, Switzerland is home to arguably Europe's most consistently successful right-wing populist party, the SVP (Swiss People's Party). The SVP is also known as the UDC (Democratic Union of the Centre). It is a national-conservative, right-wing populist political party chaired by Albert Rösti; the party is the largest in the Federal Assembly, with 65 members of the National Council and 5 of the Council of States. Founded in 1971, for 25 years, the SVP had been steadily building its electoral success through a series of increasingly nation-first, anti-immigration popular referendums (Bernhard et al., 2015: 123-137). The SVP made large gains in the 2015 federal elections, increasing its share of the vote from 26.6% to 29.4% in national elections; with the political mainstream seemingly helpless to halt its advance, Switzerland went to the polls again, demanding the automatic deportation of immigrants found guilty of even minor offenses. Since January 2016, it is represented by two members of the federal government. Under the decisive influence of Christoph Blocher's Zurich wing, the party underwent a process of radicalization in the late 1980s. The SVP adopted a profile that has turned out to be paradigmatic of populist radical right parties across Western Europe (Betz, 1993:413-427). Recently, on 7 March 2021, the SVP campaigned with slogans such as "Stop extremism" to ban face-covering in public. The measure had passed by 51.2% to 48.8% (BBC, 2021).

As early as 1991, in Ticino, appeared a movement that will decline "national-populism" on a local level. Founded in 1991 in an endeavor to challenge the well established and dominant parties of the Ticino (i.e., the Liberals, the Christian Democrats, and the Socialists) as well as to defend the interests of the people of the Italian-speaking canton in 2015, with a vote share of 1.0% at the elections to the National Council, the Ticino League is the second force from the radical right in Switzerland (Mazzoleni, 2005: 209–227). The anti-system and regionalist rhetoric of the Lega dei Ticinesi is exacerbated by its founder, the truculent Giuliano Bignasca. The tribune makes his weekly newspaper Il Mattino Della Domenica his main weapon against the institutions and politicians of the canton. In 1995, the Lega found itself faced with a paradox: its oppositional culture and its anti-establishment vocation were put to the test by its electoral scores exceeding the 20% of the vote that allowed it to integrate several municipal executives. The party mainly elects Marco Borradori to the Council of State. In 2011, the Lega became the first

party in Ticino and the only one to place two members in the government. A position it still occupies in 2017 despite the death of its undisputed leader Giuliano Bignasca in 2013 (Bernhard 2017: 512).

As a recent political party that can be described as populist in Switzerland, the MCG (Geneva Citizens' Movement) is the third-largest Swiss radical right party. With a vote share of 0.3% at the federal level, it was founded in June 2005 by Georges Letellier and Eric Stauffer on the eve of the elections to the cantonal government (Bernhard, 2017: 512). The party promised to wipe away cross-border commuters, the political establishment, and criminals (Béguin 2007: 125). Its slogan is "Geneva and Genevans first" (Bernhard, 2017: 512). In 2009, the MCG pursued its spectacular ascent by almost doubling its electoral performance by 14.7% as well as its representation. In 2013, the party fared even better. The rise of its vote share (+4.5%) translated itself into three additional seats. With 19.2%, the MCG became the canton's second-largest party behind the Liberals (22.3%) (Bernhard 2017: 512). In 2018, The MCG held the fifth position with 11 seats (Grand Council of Geneva statistics, 2021).

The purpose of this section was not to give an exhaustive list of political parties in Switzerland but to introduce the reader to the few prominent radical populists parties in Switzerland. Right-wing populism in Switzerland, which is also xenophobic and nativist, is about the challenge to the majority from racial, religious, and ethnic minorities. The agenda of these parties have at least one similarity, which is to overcome the challenge posed by immigrants and minorities to the people as a homogeneous entity.

C-Populism: a Threat to Swiss Democracy?

Assessing whether populism is a threat to democracy or not requires distinguishing between left-wing and right-wing populism as both populisms are political ideologies manifested in specific programs and practices. The focus is on right-wing populist parties, as mentioned earlier in this study. The notion of foreign overpopulation, or "Überfremdung" in German, dominated the Swiss political debate from the end of the 1960s until the end of the 1980s (Mazzoleni, 2008: 14-72). Used first by the federal administration, the theme was skillfully recovered by some political tribunes to channel the fears of a part of the population kept away from the economic miracle of the post-war period. The massive installation of immigrant workers in Switzerland represented, according to them, a real danger of dilution of the Swiss identity (Mazzoleni, 2008: 38). These ideological positions will quickly spread

in the public space through systematic recourse to the people, encouraged by the levers of direct democracy (Mazzoleni, 2008: 38). This was followed by the proliferation of extreme right-wing populists. The influence of right-wing populists leaders through discourse emphasizing culture and identities rejecting the outsiders slowly overwhelmed the political scene. Media play an important role in this context. Media, which is an important tool for the emergence of populism, is both a powerful mobilization tool on the masses and an important porter that manages the symbolic construction of ideas and arguments (Mazzoleni, 2008). The speeches of the political actors are reflected in audio-visual and print media and are effective factors in the formation of perceptions and their legitimization. With the influence of the media, populist discourses have the power of framing the agenda and shaping the masses' perceptions through reproduced oral and visual representations. In their introduction to a recent volume on style, mediation, and sociolinguistic change, Mortensen et al. Highlighted that style "always presupposes mediation, but technological media have unique styling resources to shape how meanings are made and interpreted through linguistic and semiotic performance" (Mortensen et al., 2017:1). Therefore, people are a basic category of right-wing populism. As opposed to left-wing populism, which is based on anti-elitism, right-wing populism is people-centered, thus based on people-centrism. Influencing or shaping people's perceptions is primordial in right-wing populist attitudes.

The rise of populism, in general, has its negative and positive effects. Considering the argument of positive effects, in the case of Switzerland, direct democracy practiced favor the proliferation of populist political parties. Moreover, as seen above, many populists are democrats. Populist parties commonly promise to implement more direct democratic procedures to bring politics back to the people and to increase responsiveness, that is, produce political decisions that match citizens' preferences (Caramani, 2017: 54-67; Huber and Ruth, 2017: 462–484; Ruth and Welp, 2013: 2).

In other words, in Switzerland, populism rather reinforces direct democracy. Some populists even argue that for more direct democracy, populism is necessary. It isn't populism that could be a real threat to Swiss democracy, given that the oppressed minority can always bring issues they are concern with and find solutions through referendums. People with a stronger populist attitude are more likely to claims more direct democracy. Steffen Mohrenberg and his colleagues, in their study, explained how populists' attitudes could be a support for direct democracy (Mohrenberg et al., 2018:

3). Using population-based survey data collected in late 2015 in France, Germany, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom (NCCR Democracy, 2016), that is, four Western European democracies experiencing an increase in the popularity of populist arguments, politicians, and parties (Mohrenberg et al., 2018:529), they concluded that individuals with more populist attitudes do also show more support for direct democracy (Mohrenberg et al., 2018: 535). They have chosen to carry their survey in different European countries, including Switzerland, to reach more conclusive results. Society in its diversity can not share a common idea that is desired and accepted by all, so, if they arrived at similar findings for individuals living in different political systems, why the number of populist parties is growing hence become evident.

Conclusion

Switzerland's vast experience in direct democracy procedures has become an important source of information and inspiration for democracies around the world. From Catalonia to Australia, via California, Berlin, Great Britain, and Turkey, referendums on often controversial topics have multiplied. In an era highly dominated by a wave of populism, today, virtually every European country has a populist party represented in national or regional parliaments. Most are right-wing, like Vlaams Belang in Belgium, the National Front in France, Golden Dawn in Greece, Lega Nord in Italy, the Freedom Party in the Netherlands, and the Sweden Democrats. In Switzerland, it is the Swiss People's Party that has the larger ground. In this article, I asked whether the emergence of populism is a threat to direct democracy culture and practices in Switzerland. To answer this question, I had to clarify both concepts of democracy and populism then seize how direct democracy is functioning in Switzerland and how populism impact this practice. We found that direct democracy practiced favor the proliferation of populist parties, and populist parties drive more populist attitudes among people through democratic levers like media. Therefore, the support enjoyed by populist parties in Switzerland suggests that direct democracy is self-evident with populist attitudes. Given that, in direct democracy, citizens have the opportunity to speak directly on important issues of their lives. It will be interesting to see how the proliferation of populist parties could strengthen the democracy weakened by the lack of alternation in power in the countries of the South. If citizens are consulted directly on important issues that concern them, the evidence in Switzerland shows that there will be more political and social cohesion and stability. But in countries where poverty and insecurity are rife, referendums must treat much more different issues.

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