Discuss the Contention That the Rise of Populism Leads to A <u>More Inclusive</u> Form of Democracy.

Despite its frequent use as an all-encompassing media buzzword (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Mazzoleni, 2008), modern populism presents a "highly probable option of democracy" (Anselmi, 2017, P.17) which has had a global impact across various political landscapes. With its initial conception stemming from both 19th century America and Russia, populism represents a form of majoritarian moral politics (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012; Abts & Rummens, 2007), which cleaves society into "two homogeneous and antagonistic groups" (Mudde, 2004, P.545): the morally pure and authentic *'people'* and the corrupt minority elite (Müller, 2015). Populists therefore believe that politics should only involve the expression of the unhindered *volonté générale [general will]* of the people, preferencing direct democratic methods such as referendums and majority rule. Due to its lack of a defined politically ideological core, populism has seen widespread global use given its propensity to apply to all host ideologies; with Donald Trump (Judis & Faux, 2016), Jeremy Corbyn (Prentoulis, 2021) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (Cachanosky, 2018) acting as examples of populists across the political compass. Despite classification as an "inherent element of [constitutional] democracy" (Abts & Rummens, 2007, P.406), populism has become associated with anti-democratic (Müller, 2015) and anti-liberal practices, with strong association with racist, xenophobic and homophobic groups: such as the Austrian Freedom Party *[FPÖ]* promoting anti-immigration and antisemitic political policies and rhetorics. This essay will explore the premise that populism can lead to a more inclusive form of democracy, with a particular focus on its impact on liberal democracies. First, a definition for liberal democracy will be established via the two-strand model, with additional discussion over the theoretical implications of populism in *[liberal]* democracies. Subsequently, the premise that populism has led to a more inclusive form of democracy will be explored through its impact on representation and focus on *the people* as an entity. Holistically, this essay will argue that populism *can* lead to more inclusive forms of pure democracy through the removal of bureaucratic barriers and the mobilisation of disaffected voters. However due to its illiberal nature, it cannot be classified as promoting inclusive forms of liberal democracy, due to its lack of protection for citizens' rights, anti-pluralist nature and tendency to inscite minority hate.

Within modern political theory, a functioning liberal democracy is hailed as the most important factor for *[predominantly western]* societies (Gilmartin, 2009; Callan, 1997; O'Loughlin, 2004), with Fukuyama (2006) hailing it as mankind's greatest achievement. The two-strand model provides a definition for liberal democracy through a separation of its two distinct ideologies: democracy and liberalism (Abts & Rummens, 2007). With reference to the former, the etymological definition of democracy comes from the Greek *demos kratos*, meaning power to the people. Given its complexity and multifaceted nature, democracy is difficult to define via one methodology. O'Loughlin (2004) synthesised a minimalist democracy definition through four key features which it exhibits: the provision of free and fair elections, state accountability, universal suffrage and the freedom of expression and association. This definition of a formal democracy is completely consistent with populism, with Tännsjö, (1992) referencing populism as "the purest form of democracy" (In: Abts & Rummens, 2007, P.405) as the direct expression of the will of the people overcomes much of the technocratic and bureaucratic measures that are complicit with other forms of democracy. Through preferencing direct democratic measures such as referendums and majority rule (Abts & Rummens, 2007), a more inclusive form of democracy can arguably be created through the removal of bureaucratic barriers, thus restoring sovereign rule to the people. This is exemplified through UKIP under Nigel Farage in their campaign to secure a referendum over the United Kingdom's membership of the EU (2016) which used populist rhetorics to create antagonism between *the people* and the bureaucratic nature of the EU (Hughes, 2019), ultimately resulting in power being restored to the citizens despite widespread concerns from both academics and politicians. In this case, populism allowed for a more inclusive form of pure, formal democracy as sovereign power was restored to the people via a referendum, instead of the exclusive technocratic and bureaucratic methods. However, populism cannot be said to be as inclusive to forms of liberal democracy, rather than simply pure democracies.

Liberal democracies look to extend the aforementioned definition of pure democracies to include the ideology of liberalism (Plattner, 1999). As its own doctrine, liberalism looks to protect individual rights of citizens, namely the "rights of the individual to life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness" (Plattner, 1999, P.112; Rhoden, 2015), usually via a

constitution and limited governance. To achieve this, supreme authority should be given to the rule of law as to protect citizens from power exercised by both the state and other citizens. Populism is not complicit with liberalism, as its reliance on majoritarian democratic methods means that ultimate power should lie with the people, not the rule of law (Plattner, 1998; 1999; Rhoden, 2015). Consequently, the combination of liberalism and democracy creates a paradox (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Mouffe, 2000), with modern liberal democracies having to balance the protection of individual rights and majoritarian democratic rule. Populism looks to exploit this paradox through a focus on the democratic strand, thus creating less inclusive liberal democracies; often leading to the suppression of the rights of minority groups. Kahlina (2020) exemplified this through the 2013 Croatian referendum, in which far-right populist group 'On Behalf of the Family' created "vertical antagonism" (P.227) between the people and political representatives to amass support over exclusive policies regarding LGBTQ+ marriage rights, thus impacting minority civil rights. In this case, populism demonstrated its anti-liberal nature, as its focus on expressing the people's will led to an imbalance in civil rights between minority groups and citizens of the majority. Therefore, theoretically populism does not lead to more inclusive forms of liberal democracies given its support for solely the democratic pillar, given its ideological conflict with liberalism. Nevertheless, populism does have significant impacts of other aspects within liberal democracies in practice, with its promotion of *the people* creating discussions over the degree of representation it can provide.

Given its focus on the pure and authentic nature of *the people*, populism's promotion of the democratic strand within liberal democracies has arguably led to increased representation. Populism has seen to be able to promote certain marginalised groups, particularly those who have become disaffected with politics (Clarke & Newman, 2017; Schulte-Cloos & Leininger, 2022), through its tendency to promote simplistic, yet active (BBC, 2018), rhetorics which can form cross class allegiances (Anselmi, 2017). This can be seen in practice through Donald Trump's use of populism in the 2016 presidential election (Judis & Faux, 2016; Montgomery, 2017), where support was amassed via targeting disaffected voters within the rust belt: an area of Midwestern and north-eastern states within America. Due to both declining industry and high unemployment rates of up to 17%, citizens of such states had felt neglected by the onset of neo-liberal economics and multiculturalism (McQuarrie, 2016). Trump provided

attention for such states through promoting localist and nativist policies (Wills, 2015), to return America back into an industrial powerhouse; spearheaded by the simplistic catchphrase of *'Make America Great Again'*. Such focus on marginalised populations in Ohio, Wisconsin and Michigan allowed for the vocalisation of a *silent majority* (Müller, 2015; Brubaker, 2017), leading to Trump winning both these states and the overall presidency. This demonstrates how populism can lead to the enhanced vocalisation of disaffected and marginalised voters, thus creating arguably more inclusive forms of democracy. However, there are significant issues with both the notion of a silent majority and the anti-pluralist nature of populism which can disrupt liberal democracies in practice.

As populism holds the general will of the people as the *only* authentic and proper form of governance, politics can become a moral issue which can impact liberal democracies through several means. By definition, populism must be anti-pluralist, as a position contrary to that of the people is not just a difference in viewpoint, but instead morally wrong as the people present the only method for achieving an authentic claim (Müller, 2015; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012). Under populist logic the result of a campaign which does not follow the people's will is illegitimate and consequently should not be accepted, leading to a subversion of institutions which are essential to liberal democracy. Müller references Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who lost the 2006 Mexican election, stating that both "the victory of the right is morally impossible" and that he is still the "legitimate president" (P.85). This example works to show how populism creates far less inclusive forms of liberal democracies, both in theory and in practice. Liberal democracies are pluralist by nature, given the protection of the right to *freedom of association*, and allow for contrary positions to be taken without being declared morally wrong. Furthermore, in practice, the populist moralisation of politics can make compromise and political consensus much more difficult; a factor which is not conducive to a functioning liberal democracy as shown by the Capitol riots in 2021, after Trump lost his second term presidential bid. Therefore, populism does not create more inclusive forms of liberal democracies given its anti-pluralist nature, and lack of legitimisation of opposing political bodies. Moreover, there are further concerns with populism's impact on liberal democracies when examining its tendency to incite minority hate given its focus on *the people.*

Populism is often attributed as the doctrine behind many racist and homophobic political movements, given its emphasis on *the people* as sovereign and authentic. Several commentators have recognised populism's impact in such movements (Vieten & Poynting, 2016; Pitcher, 2019; Forchtner, Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2013), with multiple discussions focusing on the role of immigration. The focus of populism on immediate and local citizens helps to create *otherness*, and the oversimplification of complex processes to promote simple populist rhetorics often results in minority groups being blamed for poorly functioning socio-economic processes. This can be seen in the Brexit campaign centring around discussions on immigration (Hughes, 2019), and the recent rise in support for the Swedish democrats who promote far-right, anti-immigration policies. Furthermore, Trumps 2016 and 2020 presidential campaigns were spearheaded by the promise of 'building a wall' in addition to tightening border control to slow immigration (McQuarrie, 2016; Wills, 2015; Demata, 2017). Populisms compliance in the promotion of these rhetorics means that it is not compatible with liberalism, nor liberal democracies, as not only is there little or no protection for the rights of minority groups *[as previously mentioned]*, but also the promotion of localism, nativism and/or isolationism stands directly against liberalisms promotion of multi-culturalism and globalism (Galloway, 1992; Plattner, 1999). Therefore, because populism itself both creates and incites otherness, it cannot be conducive to inclusive liberal democracies in practice.

Holistically, populism presents a complex and multifaceted doctrine that has been used by several host ideologies across the political spectrum. With reference to the contention, populism can be cited as the purest form of pure/formal democracy, with ultimate power residing in the people thus making it arguably the most inclusive. However, given the modern propensity to hold liberal democracies as the ultimate form of functioning democracies, populism's lack of compatibility with the doctrine of liberalism means that it cannot create inclusive forms of liberal democracies; due to prioritising the people's general will over the rule of law and thus providing no protection of rights. Whilst true in theory, populism has been cited as promoting engagement from disaffected voters and enabling cross-class alliances, in addition to providing an active form of politics that seeks to provide - often oversimplified - policy solutions. These factors can be marginally more inclusive within liberal democracies to a small and select number of people. However, populism is overwhelmingly

exclusive with reference to liberal democracies holistically, given it's anti-pluralist nature and rejection of opposition, and tendency to incite otherness which can lead to anti-globalist and racist agendas.

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