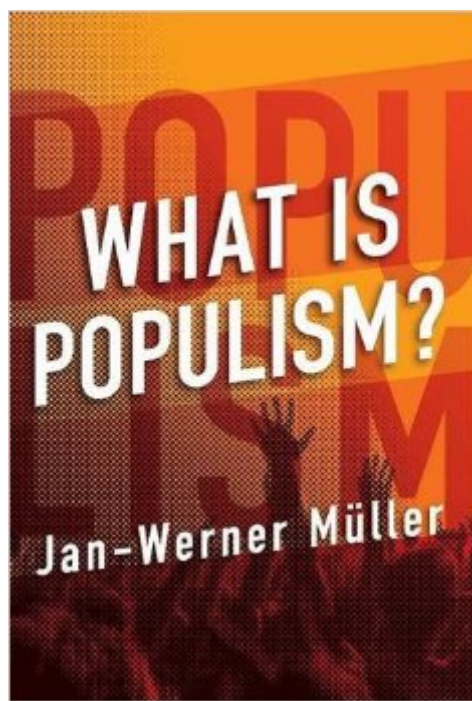# What Is Populism?

Synopsis

Donald Trump, Silvio Berlusconi, Marine Le Pen, Hugo Chávezâ "populists are on the rise across the globe. But what exactly is populism? Should everyone who criticizes Wall Street or Washington be called a populist? What precisely is the difference between right-wing and left-wing populism? Does populism bring government closer to the people or is it a threat to democracy? Who are "the people" anyway and who can speak in their name? These questions have never been more pressing.In this groundbreaking volume, Jan-Werner Müller argues that at populism's core is a rejection of pluralism. Populists will always claim that they and they alone represent the people and their true interests. Müller also shows that, contrary to conventional wisdom, populists can govern on the basis of their claim to exclusive moral representation of the people: if populists have enough power, they will end up creating an authoritarian state that excludes all those not considered part of the proper "people." The book proposes a number of concrete strategies for how liberal democrats should best deal with populists and, in particular, how to counter their claims to speak exclusively for "the silent majority" or "the real people."Analytical, accessible, and provocative, What Is Populism? is grounded in history and draws on examples from Latin America, Europe, and the United States to define the characteristics of populism and the deeper causes of its electoral successes in our time.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is an excellent and insightful book. If you think there is some symmetry between the anti-elitist tones of the Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders 2016 US Presidential campaigns, this book will

explain why that's an error. If you think that the Trump campaign, along with similar campaigns in European countries such as by the Front National in France, is articulating some valid and important "corrective" of the current purportedly democratic system, it will explain why that's an error too. And if you think populism is something that only right-wingers engage in, or that it will go back into hibernation in the US if Trump loses in November 2016 â " or, for that matter, if he wins and joins the power elite (assuming, purely for the sake of argument, that he hasn't been a member of it all along) â " well, you'll see why you're mistaken about that, too.As described in the publisher's blurb shown above, an important theme of the book is that populism rejects pluralism. For the author (JWM) this is grounds for distinguishing it sharply from progressivism, notwithstanding that for historical reasons some in the US believe the two concepts are associated. (Europeans, who experienced the populist movements Nazism and Fascism (@93), are less prone to this confusion.) Nor is populism simply anti-elitism, a mistaken equivalence that's led some commentators, and Trump himself, to assert a commonality between Trump and Sanders. Rather, says JWM, populism is the conjunction of anti-elitism with an exclusionary notion of who "we the people" are. Though it's often right-wing, such as with 1960s segregationist Gov. George Wallace, Trump, and the French Le Pen political family, it can also appear on the left, as with Hugo ChÃ¡vez in Venezuela.

What Is Populism?