İSTANBUL BİLGİ UNIVERSITY

EUROPEAN INSTITUTE

JEAN MONNET CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

Emotions, Grievances, and Democratic Governance

Ayhan Kaya, Emre Erdoğan, Pınar Uyan-Semerci, and Özlem Cihan

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This study covers the body of literature relevant to the concepts and themes discussed in the PLEDGE project, Politics of Grievance and Democratic Governance (Grant Agreement No. 101132560; Project Website https://www.pledgeproject.eu/). The PLEDGE is a Horizon Europe-funded project focusing on the emotional dynamics of political grievances and their implications for democratic politics. The PLEDGE project, which runs from 2024 to 2027, engages researchers, policymakers, and citizens in a collective effort to understand citizens' emotions better and develop practices and tools that promote emotionally responsive democratic governance and political communication, fostering pro-democratic forms of civic engagement.

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Preface

We are happy to publish Working Paper 19 of the European Institute. Based on the extensive review of the relevant literature on emotions in everyday life and politics, written within the framework of an ongoing Horizon Europe research project (https://pledgeproject.eu), this Working Paper explores how emotions such as anger, resentment, and *ressentiment* shape political discontent, populism, and polarization in contemporary societies. It examines declining trust in institutions, the rise of grievance politics, and the emotional roots of democratic dissatisfaction. Highlighting how emotional narratives drive alienation and right-wing populism, the paper also reviews interventions to reduce affective polarization, such as empathy-building, intergroup contact, and countering misinformation. Finally, it emphasizes inclusive, community-based "third spaces" as crucial for restoring belonging, bridging divides, and fostering resilient democratic engagement amid structural inequalities.

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Executive Summary

This Working Paper synthesizes insights from the PLEDGE research project, examining how emotions, grievances, and resentment fuel dissatisfaction with democratic governance and contribute to phenomena like nostalgia, populism, and polarization. Drawing from disciplines such as politics, sociology, and philosophy, it explores the social and political roles of emotions, particularly ressentiment, and the need for mattering. The second section discusses how emotions shape political dynamics in a neoliberal context, while the third section reviews public discontent with democracy, emphasizing declining political trust and rising cynicism toward institutions. The fourth section focuses on populism and affective polarization, exploring how populist rhetoric deepens societal divides and examining the root causes and potential solutions for affective polarization.

Emotional narratives increasingly influence political engagement, as structural inequalities and disillusionment with political institutions contribute to a widening gap between citizens and decision-makers. This "depoliticization" fosters alienation, polarization, and even radicalism, as neoliberal values fragment social unity and encourage binary, polarized thinking that nurtures right-wing populism and affective polarization. The reviewed literature highlights the critical role of emotions—such as anger, resentment, and ressentiment—in influencing political behavior, particularly in relation to populism, polarization, and distrust toward democratic institutions. These emotions also contribute to a broader grievance politics, which combines structural issues with individuals' perceptions and sense of belonging, challenging the sustainability of democratic governance.

To address affective polarization, a range of interventions are suggested, including correcting misperceptions, fostering intergroup contact, perspective-taking on social media, and preemptive "prebunking" strategies to counter misinformation. These efforts can mitigate partisan animosity and encourage empathy across divides. The work also underscores the importance of public spaces and localized policies that support community building, inclusive urban development, and meaningful citizenship engagement. Embracing diversity and fostering connection through 'third spaces' like community centers and youth hubs can provide marginalized individuals with a sense of belonging. More research is needed on whether these spaces can facilitate shared experiences and address grievances within democratic frameworks. In conclusion, bridging universal democratic principles with localized, inclusive approaches may be crucial to addressing the challenges posed by neoliberal governance and fostering cohesive, resilient democracies.

We would like to thank the members of the PLEDGE Consortium for their tireless efforts in providing us with insight into the politics of grievance, emotions, ressentiment, democratic governance, Democratic Design, and other relevant debates. We are especially grateful to Nicolas Demertzis from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens for his very insightful review of the earlier version of this text.

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About PLEDGE

PLEDGE, a Horizon Europe-funded project, investigates the emotional dynamics driving political grievances and their effects on democratic governance. By bringing together researchers, policymakers, and citizens, the project seeks to deepen our understanding of how emotions shape political behavior and to develop tools and strategies for fostering emotionally responsive governance and pro-democratic civic engagement. The project has several key objectives: to uncover the mechanisms linking emotions, values, identities, and beliefs to anti-democratic grievance politics and to propose ways to transform these into pro-democratic actions. PLEDGE advances this goal by introducing innovative concepts and methodologies while studying both real and virtual environments to explore their effects on the emotional dimensions of grievance politics, transparency, accountability, and democratic principles. In addition, PLEDGE identifies challenges policymakers face in addressing emotionally charged grievances, examines successful strategies employed during crises, and offers recommendations for building democratic systems that are attuned to emotional politics and policymaking.

Project Website: https://www.pledgeproject.eu/

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Emotions, Grievances, and Democratic Governance

Ayhan Kaya, Emre Erdoğan, Pınar Uyan-Semerci, and Özlem Cihan

1. Introduction

This work aims to bring together questions explored in the PLEDGE research, focusing on emotions, grievances, and resentment as they appear in discontent with democratic governance. These topics give rise to concepts like nostalgia, populism, and polarization. The literature compiled spans disciplines such as politics, sociology, political psychology, anthropology, history, cultural studies, philosophy, and economics. It covers topics ranging from the social and political nature of emotions to the role of resentment, and from growing dissatisfaction with democracy to the concerning effects of polarization, populism, and radicalization, which continue to shape democratic societies today.

The second section of this work explores emotions within a socio-political framework. With democratic politics increasingly shaped by emotions in today's neoliberal era, this section examines the role of emotions in politics, providing an overview of growing discussions on ressentiment and the need for mattering. The third section addresses rising discontent and dissatisfaction with democracy, reviewing literature that connects democratic governance with public grievances, particularly around political trust and cynicism toward institutions. The fourth section assesses research related to populism and affective polarization, as introduced in the first two sections. It examines how populist rhetoric intensifies societal divides and how right-wing populist parties exploit grievances. This section also considers a related debate: the root causes of affective polarization and strategies to address it.

2. Emotions in a Socio-Political Context

Fueled by pressing concerns about democratic governance within global neoliberalism, the political landscape is becoming increasingly shaped by emotions. Today's world seems filled with negative, pessimistic, and cynical feelings (Flinders, 2020), making the emotional dimension of citizenship more prominent and relevant in politics. This emotional state often includes feelings of marginalization, frustration with the party system and representation, distrust in institutions, and a dislike for the political establishment, which together lead to anti-political sentiments and a rising attraction to populist radical right parties.

When people transform their emotions into resentment and act on it, they shift from a competitive yet respectful form of politics to one of hostility. In an ideal democratic setting, citizens agree to acknowledge and respect each other's anger, provided all remain within democratic norms (Koncewicz, 2019). Emotions are often dismissed as irrational (Demertzis, 2020) or treated merely as signs of identity, sensationalism, or trends. However, from a political psychology perspective, emotions play a vital role in helping individuals navigate the socio-political landscape. They offer insight into voting preferences (e.g., Lodge and Taber, 2013), political attitudes (e.g., Capelos and Katsanidou, 2018), and political behavior (e.g., Capelos and Demertzis, 2018). As a result, recent research has examined how various emotional dynamics drive political engagement, especially in populism, resentment, and

reactionary politics. This section will therefore first provide a conceptual analysis of emotions within their socio-political setting and then connect these affective phenomena to broader political trends.

The Emotional Context

In the past, emotions were often overlooked and rarely discussed academically. However, there has been a surge of interest in studying emotions, particularly among sociologists of everyday life who argue that emotions are closely linked to social interactions that shape human experience. This approach is valuable for understanding emotions, as feelings emerge both from internal self-reflection and from what Maines (1982) calls the "mesostructure" of social interactions. Current sociology literature on emotions tends to be divided into two main perspectives: organistic/voluntaristic and constructionist. The organistic/voluntaristic view sees emotions as rooted in our biological makeup—emotions are thought to predate self-reflection and to be driven more by instinct than thought. In this view, social experiences trigger emotions sourced from within (Adler et al., 1987), highlighting an inward, individualistic orientation (Franks, 1985; Hochschild, 1983). The constructionist perspective, while acknowledging biological factors, focuses on how emotions are shaped, structured, and given meaning through social interactions. Here, emotions are not seen as existing independently of daily experiences; rather, these experiences evoke, mold, and define emotions, which are then labeled, interpreted, and managed through social interaction. Structural and cultural factors influence how emotions are felt and understood, as they limit possibilities and frame situations (Franks, 1985; Hochschild, 1983).

Similarly, Marcus (2000) offers two main approaches to understanding emotions. The first approach suggests that any comprehensive understanding of a person's stable traits—especially their typical ways of deciding and acting—should treat emotion as a core element of personality. In this view, emotions are seen as enduring components of a person's identity. The second approach, however, emphasizes how people's emotions react to external circumstances. Here, the focus shifts from inherent emotions tied to personality to those triggered by outside events, symbols, situations, or interactions with others. This approach explores how emotions can prompt responses that may differ from a person's usual behavior, implying that while people have typical ways of handling situations, certain triggers can evoke emotions that lead to unexpected actions. Marcus (2000) also distinguishes between moods and emotions, describing moods as general, non-specific feeling states, while emotions are directed at specific stimuli, offering context for how people feel. Marcus further suggests that cognition shapes our perception of objects, whereas affective reactions form the basis of our emotional judgments, showing the intricate connection between thought and emotion in both personal and social settings. In this context, Patricia A. Adler et al. (1987) promote a holistic approach that combines qualitative methods, like ethnography and in-depth interviews, with quantitative methods. This blend helps capture the complexity of social life, providing a deeper understanding of the micro-level interactions that form the foundation of broader social structures.

In today's complex world, emotions are no longer viewed as purely personal traits; they have become essential in understanding socio-political issues, as they significantly shape political attitudes and behaviors. Political psychology now plays a key role in examining how emotions influence collective political and social life (Salmela and von Scheve, 2017; Capelos and Demertzis, 2018; Demertzis, 2020; Kinvall and Merino, 2023). Bericat (2016) underscores

the growing acknowledgment of emotions in social interactions and institutions, suggesting future research on topics like cross-cultural differences in emotional expression and the impact of emotions on social movements. Thoits (1989) provides a foundational overview of the sociology of emotions, exploring theoretical frameworks such as symbolic interactionism and social constructionism to highlight emotions' importance in social life. Similarly, Turner and Stets (2006) emphasize the role of emotions in shaping individual behavior, social interactions, and broader social dynamics, arguing that sociological perspectives are crucial for understanding the social origins and impacts of emotions.

From a different angle, regarding the subject of anxiety, Zevnik (2017) argues that anxiety arises from how the subject comprehends and makes sense of the social world; hence, in the realm of political action, socio-political anxiety can immobilize individuals by exposing them to formidable, unknown, and unpredictable threats, thereby rendering them more susceptible to guidance and control. In this light, recent scholarly works, too, have scrutinised various emotional dynamics influencing political engagement, particularly in the context of populism, resentment, and reactionary politics. Mayer and Nguyen (2021) explore the interplay between narcissism, anger, and reactionary political orientation (RPO) in influencing support for radical right-wing parties (RRPs). They argue that narcissistic rivalry, a facet of narcissism, is associated with RPO and RRP backing, particularly when coupled with high levels of anger. By analyzing data from the German population, their study reveals that RPO acts as a mediator between narcissistic rivalry and RRP support, underscoring the significant impact of anger in shaping these connections. The authors emphasize the importance of understanding individual psychological characteristics to gain deeper insights into the mechanisms driving support for RRPs. Focusing on the particular case of Brexit, Gavin Brent Sullivan (2021) investigates the affective dimension of political behavior among UKIP supporters and non-voters in England. Sullivan studies how emotions like frustration, disillusionment, and resentment towards mainstream political parties and the political establishment motivate political reactionism. The study uncovers the underlying grievances and anxieties driving UKIP supporters and non-voters, highlighting their sense of alienation from the political system and their desire for change.

In this context, the practical impact that emotions have on *social movements* also becomes more prominent. Goodwin and Jasper (2006), while offering a comprehensive review of how emotions played a role in social movements since the 19th century, take us to the time when *a cultural turn* took place in understanding the role of emotions in the construction and articulation of social movements. Referring to the works of Alain Touraine (1977) and Alberto Melucci (1995), Goodwin and Jasper (2006) underscore that new social movements sought not economic gains or greater participation in the system but spaces of autonomy in which to enact new lifestyles and relationships. In this regard, Melucci's emphasis on participants' 'emotional investment' in the new collective identities was perceived as the chief product of mobilization, and he cautioned that "there is no cognition without feeling" (Melucci, 1995: 45). Melucci's recognition of emotions was a departure from structural analyses, and new social movement theorists' focus on culture, identity, and intersubjective processes encouraged attention to those processes even in "old" movements. To that effect, Johnston and Klandermans (1995) worked on the role of customs, beliefs, values, artifacts, symbols, and rituals in social movements while Mueller (1992) worked on ideas and beliefs, McAdam (1994) on ideas, ideology, and identity, and Calhoun (2011) on the reactionary radicalization of individuals in social movements against the destabilizing effects of modernization. Similarly, James M. Jasper (2020) offers an extensive review of the role of emotions in social movements

and argues that emotions are central to mobilizing individuals and sustaining collective action within social movements. Jasper (2020) discusses various theoretical perspectives and underscores the need for interdisciplinary approaches to understanding the interplay between emotions, collective identities, and political processes in driving social change.

Consequently, understanding these emotional dynamics is crucial for comprehending contemporary political phenomena and addressing the underlying factors that fuel political discontent and radicalization. Interdisciplinary approaches that combine insights from psychology and political science are essential for developing effective strategies to mitigate the impact of these negative emotions on political behavior. For the latter, current scholarly and practical debates intersect in the concepts that are sometimes attributed as synonyms, yet, for some, are scrutinized in slightly different meanings: the socio-political essence of ressentiment and resentment.

Ressentiment and Resentment

The neoliberal age generates similarities in the pressing concerns for seemingly opposing strata or stances. Despite the tension in growing polarized settings, everyday individuals primarily harmonize in loss and detachment, just as the existing similarities of the nativist affiliates of right-wing populist parties with migrant-origin individuals in facing structural outsiderism during neoliberal times. Both groups have experienced deindustrialization, unemployment, marginalization, inequality, epistemic injustice, humiliation, and poverty. The research conducted by Kaya et al. (2023) on the radicalization of young European citizens, both native and migrant-origin, further underscores that while they voice concerns about geographical mobility, diversity, globalization, and multiculturalism as merits, they exhibit the opposite in their actions and discourses in everyday life due to socio-economic, political, psychological, and spatial constraints. In the context of the crisis of the neoliberal age, the significance of emotions has come to the forefront. However, as the affected individuals are particularly susceptible to embracing demagogic and populist narratives that vilify and assign blame to marginalized groups within society, the crisis further prompted a focus on the concept of *ressentiment* itself.

As highlighted by Max Scheler (1915/2010), ressentiment describes a complex emotional state characterized by feelings of resentment, envy, and hostility towards those perceived as superior, and it arises from a sense of inferiority or powerlessness experienced by individuals who feel marginalized or oppressed by those in positions of authority or privilege. Scheler (1915) also emphasizes the role of social and cultural factors in fueling ressentiment, highlighting how societal hierarchies, inequality, and injustice contribute to feelings of resentment and animosity among marginalized individuals. Ressentiment is rooted in a deep-seated desire for revenge and vindication against perceived oppressors. Nowadays, many disenfranchised nativist individuals have developed various emotions such as ressentiment, resentment, rancor, rage, grudge, and other reactive feelings against the political system, the state, and mainstream political parties (Brown, 2018).

In such circumstances, the meek and weak tend to become more self-valorized and denounce the strong, as Friedrich Nietzsche (1901/1968) noted. Elaborated by Brown (2018), Nietzsche's analysis begins with the observation that suffering, particularly the suffering of humiliation, can lead to a moralizing condemnation of the perceived source of that suffering when filtered through ressentiment. His conception of *slave morality* primarily focuses on the self-righteous elevation of the weak, coupled with the denigration of the powerful. However, Nietzsche acknowledges that slave morality is also adopted by individuals characterized by

bombast, hatred, anti-Semitism, and racism, attributing their behaviors to a system of 'reactive feelings' such as grudges and anger. Therefore, according to Nietzsche, the era of nihilism signifies not the eradication of values but rather a world in which "the highest values devaluate themselves" as they detach from their foundations. In a nihilistic age, truth and reason also lose their foundations. Though still upheld, truth no longer demands evidence or rationality; as shown by the current state of the public sphere worldwide, the pervasive claims of fake news are effective, and segmented populations are presented with narratives of events tailored to their established convictions. Nevertheless, these convictions are detached from faith and are resistant to argumentation. As Brown (2018: 71) stresses, this is the liberty engendered by nihilism – the freedom encapsulated by "I will because I can, and I can because I am nothing, I believe in nothing, and the world has become nothing." This sense of liberty, a residual product of nihilism, has been evolving for centuries and is embodied in the rationale of neoliberalism, which acknowledges no worth beyond this derived from value and speculative markets – hence devaluation.

Consequently, personal or social identity transforms from one of inferiority to one characterized by nobility and superiority, as seen in cases of white supremacy or Islamist essentialism. The value attached to once-desired but unattainable aspirations also shifts, similar to Aesop's fable "sour grapes," where the fox dismisses the unattainable grapes and walks away in denial (Nietzsche, 1901/1968; Scheler, 1915/1961; Aeschbach, 2017; Demertzis, 2020; Salmela and Capelos, 2021; Capelos and Demertzis, 2022). The current question, on the other hand, also undertakes a conceptual scrutiny. Whether ressentiment and resentment, aside from their origins in the language, came to imply the same meaning anchored in anger?

In this regard, one can make a conceptual and practical distinction between ressentiment and resentment (Capelos and Demertzis, 2022; Capelos et al., 2022). Accordingly, ressentiment implies more than a simple indication of angry politics and may have significant effects on democratic governance. It is a multifaceted and pervasive experience that originates from negative emotions and sentiments directed at the vulnerable self. The transformation of the self and its values enables the projection of negative emotions onto generalized "all-bad" others, generally without specific targets experienced by individuals who feel inferior. Ressentiment emerges when anger, envy, hostility, or hatred are incorporated and mutated into ressentiment insofar as the transvaluation process is put into motion and initiated by the subject's incapacity to act out (Demertzis, 2020). Ressentiment can also arise from feelings of resentment, envy, and hostility towards those perceived as superior or privileged (Salmela and Capelos, 2021). The role of ressentiment on political attitudes and behaviors may vary in different settings. While ressentiment can be a destructive force, it may also catalyze social change and collective action (Salmela and Capelos, 2021). There is a fundamental difference, though, between how Demertzis (2020) and Salmelo and Capelos (2021) define the concept of ressentiment. While Demertzis (2020) views ressentiment as an emotion, Salmela and Capelos (2021) see it as an emotional mechanism reinforcing a morally superior sense of victimhood. What is essential here is to address the root causes of ressentiment, such as inequality, injustice, and marginalization.

Hence, resentment differs from ressentiment, an emotion characterized by bitterness, a festering desire for revenge, and a twisted sense of responsibility for one's suffering (Schneider, 2023). This distinction suggests a deeply ingrained, self-destructive psychological state that ultimately shapes one's entire perspective on the world; hence, it could not be defined only as anger. In this regard, resentment is relational; it encompasses a triangular relationship that extends beyond the aggrieved and victimized individuals to include other

people or even abstract ideas (Schneider, 2023). This emotional state persists over time and involves a different cognitive state than anger. It is consciously and persistently sharpened, involving a judgment of responsibility and blame as well as a cultivated sense of grievance. Resentment is typically not just an individual emotion, but both an emotion and an idea; it is often disseminated for political motives. It originates from a perceived injury, interpreted as an injustice or moral transgression committed by an external group (Schneider, 2023).

In a similar vein, as Capelos and Demertzis (2022) write, the notion of ressentiment blends generalized discontent, repressed aggression, bitterness, victimhood, and frustration, as well as envy and shame from feeling left behind, forgotten and dishonored. Their research on Greek populist politics indicated that the process after the 2009 economic crisis generated a fertile environment for ressentiment among citizens, particularly within a demagogic-populist political climate. Ressentiment is distinguished by feelings of powerlessness, victimhood, and a passive approach to politics. It is associated with distrust, low political knowledge, and limited appreciation of science, often prevalent among individuals in the lower-class strata.

This self-victimization and social isolation contribute to an inability to attain recognition and status in society. As frustrations intensify, core values and self-perceptions are distorted, prompting individuals to focus on the past instead of the future – hence capitalizing on a feeling of nostalgia. People experiencing ressentiment are susceptible to demagogic and populist narratives that demonize and scapegoat vulnerable groups in society. The instrumentalization of ressentiment through grievances and vice versa utilizes loyal anger politics from seemingly depoliticized individuals with a growing feeling of powerlessness in victimization. To that effect, Capelos et.al. (2022) explore contemporary anger politics by making a distinction between the action-oriented anger that can drive pro-social change and the anti-social ressentiment, which transforms grievances into morally 'righteous indignation, destructive anger, hatred, and rage'. Their finding suggests that those experiencing ressentiment tend to conflate powerlessness with a perception of victimization, leading them to regard injustice as an unalterable fate.

Consequently, they become deeply entrenched in their victimized state rather than addressing the underlying injustices. A prominent coping mechanism is the cognitive division of the world into diametrically opposed categories of "all-good" versus "all-bad," which serves to foster unity within the in-group while demonizing the out-group. Ressentiment engenders a sense of predestined fate, causing individuals to perceive situations as unchangeable, thereby constituting ineffective and passive responses. Hence, distinguished from reactive modes of anger, ressentiment in this conceptualization indicates a pervasive and complex appeal that constitutes a relative passivity with often nostalgic appropriation and contributes to grievance politics. Yet, it must be noted that these concepts continue to be used as synonyms. Ciulla (2020), for instance, explores ressentiment as a leadership and power utility without engendering a conceptual distinction from resentment. Whether approached as a multidimensional set of emotions in conceptual separation or as anger, the concept continues to generate genuine questions for our subjectivities in the neoliberal age of grievance politics. A similar consideration could be scrutinized through the idea of mattering and the meaning that such subjectivities could generate.

Mattering and Dignitarianism

The significance of emotional politics in contemporary democracies underscores the socio-political subjectivity of individuals as they articulate their emotions. An essential aspect of this

discourse is the imperative for citizens to possess the capacity and conviction to constitute meaning, make an impact, and perpetuate connections that they can relate to others. This prompts an exploration of the concept of *mattering*, as articulated by Rosenberg and McCullough (1981). The concept of mattering has become even more important in the age of populism and affective polarization since the number of people who express their grievances resulting from socio-economic, political and spatial forms of deprivation, such as the feeling of being left behind, the growing distrust in mainstream political parties, and the increasing feeling of being humiliated by the members of the majority societies. In this light, mattering holds profound significance, both at an individual level, where the feeling of being inconsequential to others is regarded as one of the most detrimental experiences, and also within society, where it serves as a crucial component of the social fabric. It is defined as feeling valued and significant to others, which is a crucial element in understanding human behavior and well-being. Research across multiple studies highlights the significant role mattering plays in influencing individuals' self-esteem, self-worth, and overall mental health. The focus on the term mattering has recently increased since scientific research found a correlation between the rise of populist sentiments and the decrease in the feeling of mattering in the lives of individuals who feel neglected, forgotten, and disenfranchised.

The growing body of scientific research on the concept of mattering can also be associated with recent advances in artificial intelligence (Cochrane, 2013; Fasel, 2019). As scientific progress has enabled unprecedented possibilities for altering human biology, as well as revealed surprising cognitive capabilities in nonhuman animals that parallel human capacities, and as artificial intelligences (AIs) begin to surpass human abilities in fields once exclusively human, the fundamental nature of humanity appears increasingly questioned. This shift has reignited interest among philosophers and legal scholars in dignitarianism, an idea originating in the Enlightenment era (Gilabert, 2018; Fasel, 2019). The dignitarian movement initially arose as a response to naturalism, a perspective holding that all phenomena, including humans, could be understood through natural laws. According to naturalists, these laws placed normative constraints on the moral and legal treatment of beings based on their intrinsic properties (Fasel, 2019). Recently, a modern form of dignitarianism has emerged, termed "new dignitarianism," as a response to discussions of AI perceived as challenging human uniqueness (Caulfield and Brownsword, 2006: 72). Driven by various religious and philosophical perspectives, advocates of "*new dignitarianism*" invoke human dignity to defend humanity's special moral and legal status against potential threats from AI, emphasizing its importance to individuals' sense of mattering.

Gregory Elliott et al. (2004) laid the foundation by providing empirical validation for the concept of mattering. They demonstrated that interpersonal relationships, social support, and recognition from others are pivotal in fostering a sense of mattering. Their findings suggest that when individuals feel they matter to others, they experience enhanced self-esteem and overall well-being. This research underscores the importance of developing social support programs and community engagement initiatives to enhance individuals' sense of mattering, which in turn promotes mental health and resilience. Building on this foundation, Gordon L. Flett (2022) delves deeper into the concept, arguing that mattering is not only a psychological construct but also a fundamental aspect of human existence. Flett's comprehensive review and conceptual analysis highlight that mattering is essential for self-esteem, life satisfaction, and mental health. He posits that feeling valued and significant is a fundamental human need, integral to individuals' happiness and fulfillment. Flett (2022)

emphasizes that promoting supportive relationships and creating inclusive communities are critical for enhancing mattering and improving overall quality of life.

Expanding the scope to existential dimensions, Login S. George and Crystal L. Park (2014, 2016) explore how mattering intersects with individuals' search for meaning and purpose in life. They introduce the concept of existential mattering, which encompasses perceptions of significance, value, and purpose within the broader existential framework. Their research suggests that existential mattering is intertwined with addressing questions of existence, identity, and mortality. By integrating various perspectives on meaning in life, George and Park (2014) argue that comprehension, purpose, and mattering are interrelated components that synergistically contribute to individuals' overall sense of meaning and well-being. They call for further research to explore the dynamic nature of existential mattering and its implications for psychological resilience.

The importance of mattering has also been highlighted in specific contexts, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Barbara Giangrasso, Silvia Casale, Giulia Fioravanti, Gordon L. Flett, and Taryn Nepon (2022) examine the roles of mattering and anti-mattering in emotion regulation and life satisfaction during this period of stress and uncertainty. Their study reveals that perceptions of mattering are associated with adaptive emotion regulation strategies and higher life satisfaction, whereas perceptions of anti-mattering are linked to maladaptive emotion regulation strategies and lower life satisfaction. These findings underscore the necessity of fostering perceptions of mattering and reducing experiences of anti-mattering to help individuals cope with stress and enhance their overall well-being during crises. Therefore, feeling valued and significant to others is essential for self-esteem, mental health, and overall well-being. Interventions and programs that enhance mattering, whether through social support, community engagement, or relational pedagogies in education, are crucial for promoting mental health and resilience. Consequently, in a world where the erosion of values leads to emotional politics, reactive behaviours, and discontent, there is a growing difficulty in constituting meaning and affirming one’s self-worth. The politics of emotions reflect this as an inevitable democratic crisis. The following section will elaborate on the discontent regarding representative democracy and its emotional dimensions.

3. Disaffection with Democracy

Disaffection with democracy often entails a negative emotional state and growing dissatisfaction with the established political order, making citizens reluctant to include or advocate for the exclusion of others from it. An increasing number of uninvolved and disaffected citizens exhibit a lack of confidence in elected representatives and representative institutions. They perceive political leaders as indifferent to the welfare of their citizens, consider institutions unworthy of public trust, and feel a general sense of alienation from political processes. Such sentiments are often expressed through negative emotions and grievances. The prevailing modern condition appears to be characterized by negative, pessimistic, and cynical emotions (Flinders, 2020; Hay, 2007).

This emotional condition may involve feelings of marginalization, perceived incapability of the party system and representation, distrust of institutions, and an aversion to the political establishment, leading to anti-political sentiments and growing appeal to populist radical right parties. Therefore, contributing layers of disaffection are manifold. Questions regarding the contemporary essence of democracy, its governing framework, efficacy, party spectrums, elites, representation, and institutional capabilities constitute prevalent subjects that have been extensively examined in numerous case studies. On the

other hand, literature emphasizes the significant role of emotions and the growing consideration of "ressentiment," providing critical insights. These examinations highlight the influence of the extensive political turmoil, resulting in a sense of disenchantment and disaffection, and reveal its correlation with populism, polarization, backlash politics and authoritarian flashes (Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

Democratic Governance

The analysis of the issue, therefore, revolves prominently around the quality of democratic governance. In the contemporary world, establishing political affiliations poses a growing difficulty, often attributed to the problem of representation as a democratic input and the efficacy of governance as a performative output (Linde and Dahlberg, 2016). Inadequate party representation and the diminishing influence and power of institutions contribute to a decline in trust in democratic governance. Bakker et.al. (2021), in this regard, investigate the interplay between party supply and citizen demand and the growing problem of ideological incongruence. Issue-specific incongruence on migration, EU, and redistribution generates national and EU-level political disaffection, leading an increasing number of citizens to vote for anti-elite and anti-establishment parties, also among mainstream party voters in European democracies. Their finding represents a critical challenge regarding the diverse interests of voters for party representation, hence an important question for current representative democracy.

Analyzing 16 backsliding democracies worldwide, Haggard and Kaufman (2021) suggest that government resources are less likely to function efficiently in polarized settings, leading to gridlock or swings between policy extremes among opposing parties. This results in higher disaffection and distrust of institutions, as mainstream parties are more likely to be captured by extremist elements. In fact, institutional practices are critical regarding political disaffection. The inefficiencies, lack of transparency, and unresponsiveness within democratic institutions contribute to a prevailing sense of powerlessness and disengagement among citizens (Offe, 2009). It is the political institutions and the experience of their functioning that constitute the citizen, instilling an understanding of duties, opportunities, and meaning, hence the practice of citizenship. Citizens are shaped and positioned as active participants in politics by the institutions where politics is actualized. Our understanding of what it means to be a citizen is cultivated through the subtle lessons of everyday politics and their formative influence.

Due to the entangled essence of institutions, performance, and citizen perceptions in modern democratic governance, disaffection inevitably constitutes a multilayered phenomenon (Offe, 2009). The governing aspect remains essential (supply side), yet it is closely interconnected with the perceived assessments and meanings formed by citizens (demand side) and perpetuated through political procedures. This converse relationship was also highlighted by Linde and Dahlberg (2016) through the distinction between citizens' democratic ideals and evaluations of democracy in practice. Their emphasis is on the complexity of understanding democratic discontent in Europe, where, for an overwhelming part of Europeans, democracy is still the only system to rely on. Specifically, the authors note that while political representation and governmental performance are crucial in shaping citizen satisfaction with democracy, in new democracies, the emphasis shifts toward performance. By contrast, in established democracies, subjective perceptions of representation and corruption play a more significant role in democratic discontent. As the authors note, this finding suggests that democratic discontent is influenced not only by

negative assessments of the government's actual performance but also by evaluations of fundamental democratic components, such as vertical accountability and opportunities for direct involvement in political decision-making.

Accordingly, citizens expect more from democracy than they receive, which leads to eroding trust and support for the political system. For others, there is a growing "expectations gap" between what is promised and what can realistically be achieved. Hence, the question of whether the performative quality of democratic governance, i.e., institutions, make of democratic citizenry, or rather, in their actual practices, citizens constitute the governing essence of democracy will not diminish. From a different angle, Schulte-Cloos and Leninger (2022), through a decade-long analysis of German municipal elections before and after the establishment of the AfD, analyzed whether electoral mobilization benefited the populist radical right. Accordingly, the populist right increased its support through electoral mobilization in areas where there was already a high level of political disaffection (Kaya, 2019). Mobilizing politically alienated segments of the population contributes to the success of the radical right. Conversely, with no history of political disaffection, the radical right is at a disadvantage when a large number of citizens participate in voting.

How citizens view democracy has a big effect on the challenges of democratic governance. Linde and Dahlberg (2016) found that the largest gaps between what people expect and what they experience are in three areas: fair treatment in court, efforts to reduce income inequality, and opportunities to directly influence public policy through referenda. While concrete problems in the system are becoming more serious, citizens' expectations for what politics and democracy should deliver are under greater pressure. With neoliberal policies making market forces the priority, some citizens feel that political participation has little value. Offe (2009) captures this view, stating that politics is not held to be 'worth the effort' because people believe what matters happens outside of politics, making political institutions seem less worthy of their trust. This difficulty in meeting diverse demands has made the emotional side of democratic governance more important than ever.

In today's populist era, many people favor what is known as *stealth democracy* rather than a highly active, participatory democratic system. Many people across the world desire democratic procedures, but prefer them to remain unobtrusive in daily life. John Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse (2002) observed in the American context that people tend to be largely indifferent to specific policies and, as a result, do not actively hold the government accountable for its decisions. However, this does not mean they reject the need for accountability mechanisms altogether. Rather, they prefer these mechanisms to remain dormant except in exceptional situations. People want to be able to activate democratic processes for oversight when necessary, even though most are unlikely to engage regularly in governance or stay informed on a routine basis. In examining similar trends in the UK, Paul Webb (2013) highlights a demand for direct democracy among *stealth democracy* supporters. He identifies two distinct forms of political dissatisfaction among British citizens: '*dissatisfied democrats'* and '*stealth democrats'*, with the former being more common. Both groups exhibit low trust in political elites, but while dissatisfied democrats are interested in politics and want more involvement, stealth democrats tend to lack political interest. Nonetheless, *stealth democrats* show an openness toward direct democracy, reflecting the populist undercurrent of their beliefs. Yet, when given the option to participate in a national referendum, both groups were generally reluctant to vote (Webb, 2013). Additionally, Peter Muhlberger (2018) suggests that *stealth democracy* beliefs may appeal to those with authoritarian tendencies. These beliefs often include support for governance by unelected experts and business leaders,

and a preference for avoiding debate and compromise. According to Muhlberger, such views align with the preferences of right-wing authoritarians, who tend to accept authority figures from the business and expert sectors. The desire for governance by unelected experts raises questions about the democratic nature of stealth democracy itself, as authoritarians typically prefer decisive authority over contentious, deliberative processes (Muhlberger, 2018).

As Van Wessel (2016) suggests, citizens act as "sense-makers," shaping their political subjectivities that influence their comprehension and interpretation of democratic governance. Through an analysis of Dutch citizens, they reveal both positive and negative perspectives in analysis. Negatives suggest that the government consistently disregards citizens and seeks direct and unmediated responsiveness. Conversely, positive perspectives indicate trust in democratic institutions and processes, with faith in the government's capacity to address societal concerns. However, both perspectives may not fully grasp the intricate reality of democratic politics and may be detached from the complexities of real politics, where compromise is often essential. Furthermore, citizens' party choices, rather than solely being protest votes, reflect their normative expectations of democracy, as discussed by Hernández (2018). From a different perspective presented by Gest and Gray (2018), inequality and social vulnerability will likely lead to the perception that affected individuals lack a meaningful voice in democratic processes. When individuals believe their opinions are disregarded, they are more inclined to disengage from democratic involvement. Consequently, the complexity arises from the evolving perceptions within these expectations, rendering them non-uniform. In this light, it is possible to undertake an alternative perspective through Flinders (2015, 2016) and Mouffe (2016) to explore the changing perceptions of democratic essence.

The arguments presented by Flinders (2015, 2016) and Mouffe (2016) are significant in their attempt to unfold the underlying problem with contemporary democracy leading to disaffection. Through Zygmunt Bauman's (2000) renowned discussion of *liquid modernity*, Flinders highlights the underlying problematization regarding the democratic crisis. Liquid modernity implies the erosion and gradual decline of those formerly stable social reference points that enabled individuals to comprehend the world and their position in it. This societal change is progressing at an increasingly rapid pace, characterized by various transformations in global capitalist societies. As highlighted by Flinders (2016), diverse types of changes are evident in every dimension of modern life, including work, relationships, communities, religion, and even aspects of life that were once considered relatively simple and straightforward, such as gender definition, are now notably more intricate and fluid. This generates a change in liberal civic culture, but most importantly, constitutes what Flinders calls 'individualized market democracy'. Akin to Foucauldian (2007) neoliberal governmentality, Flinders implies a governmental rationality, an economic government, namely, not merely consumable things but a general regulation of society by the market. This includes collective understandings of citizenship, the sphere of the political, and hence the essence of democratic politics. In this context, individuals perceive their engagement with political parties and elites as akin to a commercial relationship involving purchasing goods and services.

The progressive constriction of the democratic domain, manifested as a process of 'de-democratization,' is characterized by the reduction of democratic choices to matters of technocratic rationality or market efficiency (see Wolin, 2017; Keane, 2020). Alternatively, such decisions are displaced to non-political arenas, where experts are entrusted with decision-making responsibilities. In an individualized market democracy of rapid pace,

democratic institutions and processes remain slow and this inefficiency has been instrumentalized and exploited by populism. Despite its crisis, politics is complex, whereas populism simplifies it through simplistic evaluations and solutions. Through such pathologies, Flinders (2015) proposes an alternative model. The prevailing political narrative extolling the virtues of a democracy that consolidates power through majority rule has lost its efficacy, giving rise to a variety of disparate forms of populism. Instead of an overly democratic system, 'a post-tribal democracy' can address the apparent growing disconnect between the governing and significant portions of the governed. Therefore, for Flinders, an alternative may be to shift focus from pathologizing democratic crisis and, instead, transcend the traditional democratic paradigm, which has given a variety of such pathologies.

Within the framework of her renowned approach, 'radical democracy', Chantal Mouffe (2016) undertakes a similar stance and criticizes the depoliticization of democracy. Through individualization and privatization and the 'taming of the political', liberal thought aimed to rationalize consensus in an attempt to constitute social harmony. For Mouffe, this attempt to eradicate antagonisms eviscerates the political and depoliticizes democracy. The pursuit of liberal thought to eliminate power dynamics and conflicts results in the misleading belief in a harmonious coexistence without inherent disagreements. However, what is crucial is to establish systems of power that adhere to democratic principles. In a democratic society, the presence of conflicts and opposition does not indicate inadequacy. Instead, it underscores the vibrancy of democracy, influenced by diverse perspectives and ideologies. The central challenge in democratic politics lies in effectively managing the inherent us-them distinction while acknowledging plurality. Therefore, human coexistence is inherently conflictual, as it is shaped by the presence of the political. In democratic politics, then, the aim must be transforming potential 'antagonism into agonism'. Within the framework of agonistic models, the principal objective of democratic politics is not the elimination of passions or their relegation to the private sphere but directing them toward democratic objectives by creating collective forms of identification around democratic objectives**.** The depoliticization of democratic politics, characterized by consensual and harmonious imagining, has led to the inability of traditional political parties to present distinct forms of identification for potential alternatives. In the view of Mouffe, this has contributed to the surge of right-wing populism. The success of right-wing populist parties in mobilizing emotions and fostering collective forms of identification accounts for their strong appeal. The latter has emerged as a significant constituent of democratic discontent: the emotional weight that drives disaffection.

Emotions and Democratic Governance

As previously discussed, there is a growing recognition of the concept of ressentiment within the socio-political sphere. This phenomenon often originates from the emotional weight carried within democracies. Leaders effectively employ and exploit ressentiment to garner support by addressing real and perceived grievances. Growing inequalities in socio-economic opportunities intensify victimization, and the instrumentalization of ressentiment through grievances and vice versa utilizes loyal anger politics from seemingly depoliticized individuals with a growing feeling of powerlessness in victimization. A seemingly similar argument is presented by Marcus (2021), suggesting that the experience of emotions precedes cognitive evaluations, influencing judgments and decisions. Especially in times of crisis and lack of stability, populist leaders and populist rhetoric target grievances because emotions mobilize support and populism, rather than rational deliberation or rational thought processes, 'thrives on emotional appeal'. In this regard, the emotional weight of populist appeal has been a

widely shared discussion and finding in the literature, leading to anti-establishment, polarized, and also Eurosceptic pathologies (Bonansinga, 2020; Leser and Spissinger, 2020; Abts and Baute, 2022).

Capelos et al. (2021) examine the intersection of reactionary politics and resentful affect in the context of populist movements. They explore how populist rhetoric and policies capitalize on feelings of resentment and how populist leaders exploit these emotions to mobilize support and foster a sense of belonging among their followers. In a similar vein, Monika Verbalyte et al. (2022) investigate emotional responses to crises in Europe and examine how emotions influence public perceptions and political dynamics during crises, highlighting the importance of considering emotional dimensions in crisis communication and governance. Emotional responses of various social groups to the crisis of representative democracy constitute one of the most important drivers of the rise of right-wing populism in contemporary times. To that effect, Cas Mudde (2021) explores the rise of populism in Europe as a response to undemocratic liberalism. Mudde (2021) argues that, when in opposition, populism represents a form of democratic renewal, driven by emotional responses to perceived failures of liberal democracy, emphasizing the need to address underlying grievances to mitigate the illiberal tendencies of populist movements.

The emotional significance in this context is intricately intertwined with the norms and institutions of representative democracy, resulting in the formation of perceptions and practices that are mutually constitutive. In this regard, communicating resentment and ressentiment with their constituents has also become an essential element for all the catch-all political parties, including the right-wing populist parties. Karen Celis et al. (2021) discuss the concept of resentment and its implications for democratic politics. The authors explore how feelings of resentment among citizens can challenge democratic norms and institutions, and fuel distrust, polarization, and political disengagement, while also providing opportunities for democratic renewal and resilience. The authors highlight the importance of understanding resentment as a complex and multifaceted emotion that can both undermine and invigorate political discourse and behaviour, hence, democratic processes. They argue that while resentment may pose challenges to democratic governance, it may also catalyse political mobilization, accountability, and social change. They suggest that promoting inclusivity, equality, and responsiveness in democratic institutions can help mitigate feelings of resentment and foster a more resilient and inclusive democracy. Similarly, Balázs Kiss (2021) examines the utilization of ressentiment in Hungarian political communication. Kiss (2021) highlights how both political factions leverage ressentiment by employing tactics such as scapegoating and identity manipulation, resulting in outcomes like externalization, self-victimization, and transvaluation. The study underscores the need for further exploration into political communication and the management of ressentiment, emphasizing the intricate interplay between emotions, political discourse, and societal dynamics in Hungary's political landscape.

For Neblo (2020), too, emotions matter, yet from a somewhat different perspective. Neblo (2020) underlines how the critical role of emotions in democratic deliberation has been misunderstood and underappreciated. Emotions are not only pivotal in contemporary politics, including its crisis, but they are also enriching when it comes to deliberation through nuanced and empathetic dimensions. On this matter, Kusiz and Wigura (2020) generate a more straightforward argument and criticize liberals for ridiculing the emotional reaction to loss in the post-1989 period and letting populists dominate the emotional landscape. For the authors, the emotion of loss was reactive; thus, reclaiming a politics of emotion is imperative

to counter populism. Frevert and Pahl (2022) also supported this approach through the importance of institutions. Like Offe (2009), they suggest that institutions in our political world provide a frame of meaning, appropriateness, and goals. Consequently, the following section will finalize the discussion with a review of political trust and institutional cynicism.

Political Trust and Institutional Cynicism

In contemporary social science literature, the concept of trust and its dimensions are examined across diverse contexts, from political systems to societal structures. The growing lack of trust in traditional political institutions—such as political parties, parliaments, the judiciary, police, military, and bureaucracy—is recognized as one of the root causes of the rise of anti-systemic right-wing populism. Trust in institutions, whether supranational bodies like the EU, legal systems, or political entities, is deeply influenced by perceptions of performance, legitimacy, and identity. When trust is eroded—whether through economic decline, political scandals, or digital opacity—it can lead to civic disengagement, demand for reforms, and the rise of populist-prone sentiments. The decline in political trust, then, provides an opportunity for populist movements to capitalize on disenchantment and deepen democratic instability; hence, institutional cynicism. In parallel, the phenomenon of institutional cynicism, marked by widespread skepticism towards political and social institutions, has emerged as a significant issue in the context of growing populist movements. Kidd (2023) distinguishes between institutional cynicism and healthy skepticism, arguing that excessive cynicism undermines civic engagement and democratic health. This erosion of trust emphasizes the importance of striking a balance between critical evaluation and constructive participation, with efforts to combat cynicism focusing on transparency and accountability to preserve civic virtue.

As Nicolas Demertzis (2014) points out, political cynicism is not monolithic; individuals' positions within social hierarchies shape distinct forms of cynicism. Both the "haves" and the "have-nots" may exhibit cynical attitudes, but these are rooted in different economic realities (Goldfarb, 1991: 14). The cynicism of elites contrasts sharply with that of those lacking power. Elite or top-down cynicism often involves a disregard for norms, institutions, and ideals, aimed at furthering personal or group power (Goldfarb, 1991: 16). In this context, democratic principles become a mere façade; the powerful cynic manipulates appearances, feigning respect for democratic ideals while subduing weaker opponents with a smile, as Peter Sloterdijk (1988: 111) metaphorically describes.

Nicolas Demertzis (2014), drawing on Sloterdijk's (1988) work, highlights a parallel between two forms of political cynicism: 'cynicism' and 'kynicism.' This is a very useful distinction to use in the age of populism. In this framework, *cynicism* represents the mocking, oppressive cynicism of elites and dominant culture, while *kynicism* embodies the provocative, defiant stance of the marginalized. These dual forms of cynicism - "from above" and "from below"- are recurring elements throughout history (Sloterdijk, 1988). In this context, political cynicism may not be entirely harmful to democratic politics. Despite its pessimism, sarcasm, and irony, a balanced blend of skepticism and doubt allows some cynical citizens to remain open to reform and innovation without veering into radical relativism or nihilistic indifference (Demertzis, 2013; 2014). Cynical individuals with such a disposition still value their citizenship and stay informed, maintaining a critical but engaged approach to politics. This constructive form of political cynicism resembles what Paul Webb (2013) terms 'dissatisfied democrats,' who seek to transform the system rather than abandon it. Conversely, those absorbed in cynicism, characterized by bad faith and contempt, view all political discourse as futile, lack self-awareness, and harbor near-paranoid distrust toward political figures and decision-

making processes (Krouwel and Abts, 2007; Demertzis, 2014). This form of cynicism, deeply rooted in "ressentiment," involves alienated individuals who withdraw from political participation and maintain a highly negative outlook (Demertzis, 2014). Such individuals do not simply criticize politics but actively reject it, embodying a destructive cynicism that clashes with democratic values. This aligns with the behavior of Webb's (2013) 'stealth democrats,' who show disdain for political engagement altogether.

The literature also shows that individuals who are exposed to various forms of perceived injustice in everyday life are more likely to become skeptical about the legal system. Oliveira and Jackson (2021) review the concepts of legitimacy, trust, and legal cynicism, exploring their interrelationships and implications for public perceptions of legal systems. They argue that legitimacy—a belief in the fairness and justice of legal institutions—encompasses trust and is crucial for compliance with the law. Legal cynicism, marked by skepticism about the legal system's integrity, often arises from experiences of injustice. Their findings suggest that enhancing procedural justice and addressing systemic biases are essential for building legitimacy and reducing cynicism. The decline of political trust does not only result in the rise of cynicism but also the rise of citizens' support for democratic reforms.

The decline in political trust affects citizens' support for democratic reform (Ouattara and van der Meer, 2023). Low and declining trust in political institutions correlates with increased support for reforms aimed at enhancing transparency and accountability. This relationship underscores the importance of addressing trust issues to foster democratic stability and suggests that democratic reforms can be a response to declining trust, aiming to restore faith in political institutions. Further contributing to this line of argument, Jens Carstens (2023) provides a comprehensive review of political trust's conceptualizations, determinants, and consequences. In a similar way to the distinction between 'cynicism' and 'kynicism' made by Nicolas Demertzis (2014), Carstens (2023) also emphasizes the differentiation between *healthy skepticism* and *corrosive cynicism*, noting that while the former can enhance democratic accountability, the latter erodes political engagement and stability. Carstens (2023) argues that political trust is influenced by factors like economic performance, corruption, media influence, and institutional fairness, with significant implications for democratic participation and support for populist movements.

The trust in the European Union is a relevant point of discussion in the realm of politics. To that effect, Harteveld et al. (2013) discuss the determinants of trust in the European Union (EU), emphasizing three primary logics: utilitarian, political, and identity-based. They demonstrate that trust in the EU is not monolithic but shaped by economic benefits, political evaluations, and European identity. Research also reveals that there is a correlation between political trust and disenchantment. In this regard, Newton (2015) provides a broader context by examining the decline in political trust across democracies and its implications for political disenchantment and identifies economic downturns, political scandals, and institutional performance as key factors eroding trust. In this regard, Eri Bertsou (2019) enhanced the conceptual outlook by undertaking a reverse perspective. Bertsou (2019) develops a model based on technical, ethical, and interest-based evaluations to understand the multifaceted nature of political distrust. This distrust, Bertsou (2019) argues, can lead to political instability and decreased participation, yet also fosters accountability and vigilance among citizens. Felix Butzlaff and Sören Messinger-Zimmer (2020) expand on Bertsou's themes by exploring how different forms of political distrust impact democratic engagement in times of populist upsurge. Through a mixed-methods approach, they reveal that while some forms of distrust lead to disengagement and apathy, others stimulate alternative forms of participation, like

involvement in civil society organizations (Hay, 2007). Their findings emphasize the variability of political distrust's consequences, contingent on social divisions and contextual factors.

One important dimension for the contextual question is the comparative analysis presented by Alistair Cole et al. (2022) on how the erosion of political trust varies across the UK, France, and Germany, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. They argue that civil society plays a crucial role in rebuilding trust through co-production and co-creation with the state, although this process faces significant challenges in regions lacking shared identity or history. In the context of crises, Daniel Devine et al. (2020) focus on how these different types of trust influence governance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their research, based on surveys from several countries, reveals that trust generally promotes compliance and positive behavioral responses, while mistrust encourages critical engagement and vigilance. Distrust, however, is linked to negative perceptions of governance and lower policy compliance, highlighting the need for nuanced strategies to balance trust and mistrust for resilient governance.

These contemporary studies resonate David Easton's classic work (1975) who distinguished between specific and diffuse support within political systems. Easton (1975) argues that while specific support for particular leaders or policies is volatile, diffuse support for the political system and its values is critical for long-term stability. This distinction underscores the importance of cultivating both types of support to maintain political legitimacy and effectiveness. Extant knowledge also demonstrates that the erosion of trust was observed even more during global pandemics, particularly COVID-19. Terry Flew (2021) examines the role of communication in this trust deficit, highlighting how media dynamics, misinformation, and crisis communication strategies influence public trust. Effective communication strategies that emphasize transparency, consistency, and empathy are crucial for maintaining trust, particularly in countries with pre-existing low levels of institutional trust. The reliability and integrity of politicians become even more essential in times of crisis for the people to continue their trust in politics and political institutions. To that effect, Nick Clarke et al. (2018) investigate the qualities that define effective political leadership which involves not just winning elections but fostering collaboration, consensus-building, and problem-solving.

Positive economic indicators like GDP growth also correlate with higher political trust, while negative indicators such as rising unemployment decrease trust (Van Erkel and Van der Meer, 2016). This relationship is especially pronounced during economic crises, highlighting the importance of effective economic governance for political legitimacy. There is also a link between unemployment rates and support for radical left parties in Europe (Mádr, 2023). Mádr's quantitative analysis demonstrates that higher unemployment rates increase support for these parties, driven by economic dissatisfaction and the demand for radical change. This study provides insights into how economic grievances can fuel political radicalization, influencing electoral behavior. Andreas Reckwitz (2020) articulates a profound shift in societal values from generality and uniformity to uniqueness and authenticity. This transformation influences personal identities, economic frameworks, and cultural practices. Reckwitz (2020) employs social practice theory to explain how late-modern societies prioritize singularities, moving away from the industrial era's focus on standardization. Influences from theorists like David Brooks and Boltanski and Chiapello are evident in Reckwitz's framework, integrating sociological and cultural analysis with case studies. His exploration of cultural production, consumer behavior, media, urban spaces, and economic practices shows how the pursuit of uniqueness leads to both creativity and social fragmentation. Reckwitz's discussion of singularity intersects with the broader theme of trust in political and social systems. In this era

of liquid modernity, marked by constant change and uncertainty, democratic governance faces a crisis in growing grievances. The erosion of trust, compounded by neoliberal rationality, leads to fragmentation, devaluation, and discontent. As the gap between the ruler and the ruled intensifies, the emotional weight reflected in such typologies is instrumentalized by far-right and populist parties, contributing to what is now recognized as affective polarization.

4. Populism and Affective Polarisation

In 1967, researchers at the London School of Economics organized a conference on populism, resulting in a 1969 book edited by Gellner and Ionescu, which noted that "populism worships the people" but failed to reach a broader consensus. Cas Mudde (2016) later analyzed populist resentment behind figures like Trump and Le Pen, arguing that events like Brexit are catalysts, rather than root causes, since resentment predates them and can be linked to factors like de-industrialization, unemployment, and increasing ethno-cultural diversity (Berezin, 2009: 43-44). Scholars explain populism through socio-economic grievances linked to globalization suggesting that the 'losers' of these processes respond by rejecting mainstream parties and fostering ethnic competition against migrants (de Vries and Hoffmann, 2016), ethno-nationalist sentiments emphasizing traditional values and a homogenous national identity in confronting perceived threats from globalization, Islam, or the European Union (Rydgren, 2007), and populist leaders' and parties' strategy to appeal to their constituents, characterizing populism as a distinct political style that transcends responses to external factors (Beauzamy, 2013; Laclau, 2005). Mabel Berezin (2009) categorizes European populism along institutional and cultural axes, where the institutional axis examines local organizational capacity and policy recommendations, while the cultural axis looks at the parties' intellectual resources to address globalization's effects and their readiness to engage with xenophobic and racist discourses. Right-wing populism is particularly successful when it combines economic frustration, such as unemployment, with cultural concerns like immigration (Laclau, 2005). Populist movements draw on diverse narratives, from historical fascism to Christian rhetoric (Kaya, 2015; Wodak, 2015), with blurred lines between left- and right-wing populism, as left-wing movements often focus on re-educating the populace while right-wing populists appeal to common sense; yet both can exhibit elements of the other's ideology, leading to a nuanced landscape that challenges conventional political classifications.

Affective polarization, on the other hand, is generally defined as the intense negative feelings towards a political party and/or supporters of that political party. In different country contexts, it is possible to observe various political polarizations, like affective polarization. However, affective polarization is characterized primarily by emotional responses rather than political, issue-based, or ideological disagreements. Hence, unlike ideological polarization, which involves divergence in policy preferences (Wilson et al., 2020), affective polarization focuses on strong identification with one's party, fostering ingroup favoritism and hostility towards the outgroup. It is amplified by false polarization, where perceived ideological differences are greater than reality (Westfall et al. 2015), and social polarization, which stems from identity alignment with political parties (Mason, 2015). Several interrelated mechanisms drive affective polarization. It primarily stems from individuals' strong identification with a political party, which divides the world into a liked ingroup (one's own party) and a disliked outgroup (the opposing party). This identification fosters ingroup favoritism and outgroup hostility, increasing negative feelings toward the opposing party and its members. Digital media and misperceptions exacerbate these dynamics by intensifying negative emotions

towards opposing groups, particularly through anger and disgust in polarized online environments. Misperceptions also play a crucial role; individuals often overestimate out-party members' positions, extremity, and political engagement, leading to heightened animosity (Iyengar et al., 2019; Törnberg, 2022; Druckman et al., 2021; Feldman et al., 2023).

Affective polarization manifests itself in two different forms: horizontal, involving interpersonal hostility among citizens, and vertical, characterized by distrust toward political elites and institutions, both contributing to societal fragmentation and declining political trust. The basic methods for measuring affective polarization focus on assessing negative feelings and distrust toward opposing political groups. One primary method is the feeling thermometer, where respondents rate their warmth or coldness towards political parties on a 0-100 scale, with greater differences between ingroup and outgroup ratings indicating higher polarization (Druckman and Levandusky, 2019). Various methods include trait ratings, in which individuals evaluate how accurately positive and negative traits represent members of a political party (Iyengar et al., 2019); measures of social distance that assess people's comfort levels with having members of opposing parties in personal roles, like neighbors or family members (Levandusky and Malhotra, 2016); and trust ratings for different parties or leaders, which indicate polarization based on the level of trust disparity between in-group and out-group parties (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015).

Implicit measures, like the Implicit Association Test and the Implicit Positive and Negative Affect Test, also assess unconscious biases and political attitudes by measuring response latencies, preventing social desirability bias (Payne et al., 2005; Houwer and Bruycker, 2007). Economic games, such as the dictator and ultimatum games, reveal biases in economic decisions based on group identity, indicating affective polarization (Baumert et al., 2014; Bechler et al., 2015). In multiparty systems, like-dislike scores, affective blocs, cognitive political networks, the Affective Polarization Index, and scale variance methods provide more nuanced or comparative insights into affective polarization across parties (Wagner, 2021; Reiljan, 2020). Consequently, the intersection of emotional politics and democratic grievances forms the basis for the appeal of populism and the deepening of affective polarization. This intertwining dynamic arises in emotional responses to socioeconomic and cultural issues by populist leaders, which cultivates an environment conducive to affective polarization. The section will, therefore, review this entangled effect that the current sociopolitical crisis engenders.

Emotions of Populism and Polarization

Eelco Harteveld et al. (2022) explore the concept of affective polarization and its relationship with the success of populist radical right parties in Europe. Their research highlights how emotional divides and animosity between political groups fuel resentment and hostility, which populist radical right parties effectively exploit to gain support. The authors underscore the significance of affective polarization in shaping political behavior and party allegiance, calling for further research into the emotional dimensions of political divides to comprehend the rise of populist movements. Sofia Ammassari (2023) studies the motivations behind individuals joining populist radical right parties, emphasizing the interplay between disaffection and efficacy. Ammassari (2023) argues that dissatisfaction with mainstream politics, economic grievances, and cultural anxieties drive individuals toward populist radical right parties, which offer a sense of empowerment and belonging. The study highlights the importance of understanding the psychological and socio-political factors that motivate support for these parties, particularly the belief in one's ability to effect change.

In fact, according to several empirical studies, affective political polarization results in declining respect for other groups' rights in society. It can lead to avoidance, intolerance, and even support for violence against political opponents (Druckman et al., 2019; Berntzen et al., 2023). This negative behavioral consequence may be crystallized into discrimination against opposing partisans in nonpolitical judgments and behaviors, surpassing even racial discrimination in some contexts. This suggests a deep-rooted bias affecting everyday interactions, even in building social or economic relationships (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Druckman and Levendusky, 2019). Hence, affective polarization involves strong antagonism towards political outgroups, characterized by enmity and conflict, making it a form of antagonistic behavior in political contexts. Research indicates that affective polarization reflects both ingroup favoritism and outgroup hostility, aligning with antagonism, where negative sentiments are directed at outgroups. Affective polarization also reinforces social dominance orientation (SDO) among many individuals who endorse the idea of hierarchy between groups in society or the dominance of certain groups over others (Kleppesto et al., 2021).

In contrast, as discussed, Mouffe (2016) proposed that agonism involves recognizing legitimate political opposition and engaging in a struggle over ideas while maintaining mutual respect. Agonism values ideological distance and alternative viewpoints but aims to avoid the destructive effects of antagonism, unlike affective polarization, which focuses more on emotional and social distance and division. Affective polarization and antagonism lead to increased social division, reduced trust in political institutions, and hindered democratic arrangements. Behavioral manifestations of affective polarization include social avoidance, discrimination, and heightened partisanship, whereas antagonism results in direct conflict and adversarial interaction. Conversely, agonism encourages active engagement and debate, promoting understanding and respect for differing viewpoints. Thus, while affective polarization and antagonism exacerbate social divisions and undermine democratic engagement, agonism offers a more constructive approach to political conflict (Wagner, 2020; Roskamm, 2015; Stavrakakis, 2018).

The deepening of antagonistic essence through affective polarization strengthens the ground for grievance politics. Through this fundamental essence, populism and affective polarization reinforce each other. Emotions, especially negative ones like fear, anger, and resentment, significantly contribute to the rise of right-wing political populism (Salmela and von Scheve, 2017). Populist leaders and movements harness these emotions to mobilize support, shape group identities, and frame political issues in ways that resonate with their audience (Salmela and von Scheve, 2017). Through an extensive review of literature from psychology, sociology, and political sociology, they elucidate how emotions act as powerful motivators for political behavior. They argue that fear of cultural change, economic insecurity, and perceived threats to national identity fuel emotions that right-wing populists exploit to garner support. In this regard, Manuela Caiani and Jessica Di Cocco (2023) take a comparative approach to investigate the relationship between populism and emotions, utilizing machine learning techniques to analyze political speeches and communications. Their study finds that populist leaders often evoke strong emotional responses, leveraging sentiments of discontent and frustration to rally support. This emotional rhetoric is central to the appeal of populist movements, highlighting the strategic use of emotions to engage and mobilize supporters.

Right-wing populist parties and their leaders are more successful than the mainstream political party cadres in their responses to the emotions of their constituents. This is one of the strengths of the populist parties. To that effect, Ruth Rebecca Tietjen (2023) explores the

role of affect, or emotions, in populism. She argues that emotions such as anger, fear, and resentment shape the emergence and impact of populism. Tietjen (2023) analyzes the relationship between affect and populism, concluding that affect plays a multifaceted role in populism, influencing the appeal of populist messages and the responses to populist rhetoric. The relative success of right-wing populism is very well explained by Huber et al. (2023), who find that populist parties often emphasize collectivist ideologies, which assume an oppressed homogeneous group. Using expert survey data from Europe, their study shows how party positions and the salience of policy dimensions predict populism. Paris Aslanidis (2018, 2020a) contributes to the discussion by examining populism as a collective action master frame for transnational mobilization and exploring the role of culture in populism studies. Aslanidis (2018) argues that populism serves as a unifying narrative that transcends national boundaries, enabling collective action among diverse groups. Aslanidis (2020a) also emphasizes the importance of incorporating cultural perspectives into populism research to understand the emotional, symbolic, and aesthetic dimensions of populist movements. In his work on the social psychology of populism, Aslanidis (2020b) further explores how psychological factors contribute to the rise and appeal of populist movements (see also Ostiguy, 2009). He identifies key psychological mechanisms, such as group identity formation and cognitive biases, that shape individuals' perceptions of the political landscape.

The discussion of heritage could also be addressed since it has become an important terrain for right-wing populist parties to appeal to people (Kaya, 2019; Bonacchi, 2022). Ashworth, Graham, and Tunbridge (2007: 2-3) define heritage as such: “[Heritage] is the use of the past as a cultural, political, and economic resource for the present.” The fieldwork and supporting research indicate that right-wing populist parties and their supporters are more likely to assemble their futures with a retrospective understanding, which essentializes the past, myths, and local history, the repertoire of which is often very rich. The use of the past provides them a shield with which to protect themselves against the perils of globalization. In this context, Harrison considers heritage a form of governmentality. In focusing on the use of the past by right-wing populist parties and their adherents, there is a growing literature (for a review see Kaya, 2019; de Cesari and Kaya, 2019) concentrating on understanding how the processes of the heritageisation and culturalization of what is socio-economic and political operate in everyday life, and why and how these socio-economic and political problems are translated by individuals into cultural, religious and civilizational rhetoric through what Dominique Reynié (2016) calls ‘heritage populism’. To that effect, Stefan Couperus et al. (2023) explore the strategic use of historical narratives by far-right movements to advance political agendas and shape collective identities across Europe. Utilizing theories of collective memory, nationalism, and populism, the authors demonstrate how these movements construct an imagined community based on shared memories and myths, exploiting historical narratives to foster a sense of collective identity and belonging.

The extensive research on populism contributes significantly to enriching discussions intersecting with systemic, structural, cultural, emotional, and societal dynamics that generate a comprehensive outlook of the current political landscape. Arzheimer and Bernemann (2023) examine how place-based factors like economic prosperity and historical experiences shape populist radical right sentiment in Germany. Roberts (2022) offers a framework combining identities, geographical contexts, and governance structures to understand political dynamics. Ivanou (2020) explores authoritarian populism in rural Belarus, highlighting the decline of social cohesion and historical impacts. Joppke (2021) connects neoliberalism and populism, linking economic inequalities to nationalist sentiments. Studies

on youth activism (Pickard et al., 2020; Krawatzek, 2020) underscore the influence of social networks and ideological factors in shaping protest attitudes, while Beck (2008) bridges social movement theory and terrorism studies to enhance understanding of political violence. These collective studies significantly contribute to a more profound comprehension of populism, particularly in terms of its emotional and psychological foundations that reinforce affective polarization and vice versa. It is also essential to reevaluate their causality to attain a more comprehensive understanding of their intersection.

Roots and Effects of Right-Wing Populism and Affective Polarization

We can observe that populism and polarization bring to the forefront the issues of democratic governance and grievance. The socio-political context of emotions also becomes more evident within these issues as more concrete reactions. It is important to note that the scope of discussions is not limited to populism and polarization alone. There is a wide variety of pathologies to consider. However, we can establish a solid common ground through these perspectives. For instance, discussions on radicalization are also a significant point of interest that intersects within this context and manifests as a pathology in both right-wing populism and affective polarization. Radicalization is linked to mechanisms producing extreme beliefs (van den Bos, 2018), with group membership playing a key role in collective radicalization.

Historically, radicalism is associated with opposition to the status quo and political ideologies that drive change, with system justification informing more about the characteristics of the groups involved (Jost, 2017). The term 'radicalization' has often been used to focus on Islamist groups, suggesting Islamism as the dominant counter-hegemonic force in response to globalization (Anderson, 1998; Appadurai, 1996). For instance, offensive mobilization, often top-down, is evident in right-wing populist movements generating Islamophobia (Kaya, 2019). Indeed, neo-liberal forms of governmentality coupled with the securitization of migration and Muslim minorities might paradoxically be used to culturalize (or 'religionize') the consequences of policy decisions to mask their socio-economic underpinnings (Kaya, 2015). Nonetheless, by doing so, Western neo-liberal and/or populist political parties may fuel even further social tension and threats, leading to an actual increase in violent extremism. These, on the other hand, include nativist sentiments as well. In a similar vein, Christian Joppke (2021) examines the intersection of neoliberal economic policies and the rise of populist right-wing movements, focusing on immigration issues. Joppke (2021) argues that neoliberalism has paradoxically fueled nationalist and populist sentiments by creating economic inequalities and social insecurities and provides valuable insights for the complex relationship between economics, sentiments and identity politics.

Craig Calhoun (2011), in this regard, claims that the defense of tradition by nationalist, nativist, populist and/or religious groups has become a radical stance today. He even continues to suggest that this sort of populism and conservatism "has been important to struggles for democracy, for inclusion in the conditions under which workers and small proprietors live" (Calhoun, 2011: 250). In this regard, rather than being a divergence or a mere longing, right-wing populism is actually a response to, and rejection of the order imposed by neoliberal elites, an order that fails to use the resources of the democratic nation-state to harness global processes for local needs and desires (Mouffe, 2018; Kaya, 2019). Such populism originates in the deep-rooted structural inequalities and general impoverishment that mainstream political parties have actively contributed to in their embrace of neoliberal governance.

As opposed to the sociological approaches, anthropological approaches mostly understand populism as the moods and sensibilities of the disenfranchised who face the disjuncture between everyday lives that seem to become extremely anomic and the wider public power projects that are out of their reach and suspected of serving their ongoing disenfranchisement (Kalb, 2011). Combining the socio-economic and cultural dimensions, anthropological approaches focus on 'those left behind by the march of neoliberalism'—those essentially abandoned by social democrats and the traditional centre-left that have embraced neoliberalism since the 1990s (Boyer, 2016). As Andrés Rodrigues-Pose (2018) put it, populism as a political force has taken hold in many of the so-called spaces that do not matter, in numbers that are creating a systemic risk. As in developing countries, the rise of populism in the developed world is fuelled by political resentment and has a distinct geography. Populist votes have been heavily concentrated in territories that have suffered long-term declines and reflect an increasing urban/regional divide. It is not a surprise then to see that right-wing populism has become a recurring phenomenon in remote places such as Dresden, Toulon, Rotterdam, and Aalst, as well as rural and mountainous places which no longer matter the neo-liberal political parties in the centre that are heavily engaged in the flows of globalization such as international trade, migration, foreign direct investment and urbanization.

In this regard, populism is not a disease or irrational anomaly, as it is often portrayed, but as the symptom of structural constraints that have been disregarded by mainstream liberal political parties in power in the last three decades. Populism is a systemic problem with deep structural causes. Populist parties' voters are dissatisfied with and distrustful of mainstream elites, who are perceived as cosmopolitan, and they are hostile to immigration and growing ethno-cultural and religious diversity—what Steven Vertovec (2007) calls 'superdiversity'. While some of these groups feel economically insecure, their hostility springs from a combination of socioeconomic deprivation and nostalgic deprivation (Gest et al., 2017) resulting from their belief that immigrants and ethno-cultural and religious minority groups are threatening societal and national security (Reynié, 2016). In other words, the anxieties driving support for these parties are rooted not solely in socio-economic grievances but in cultural fears and a (cultivated) sense of cultural threat coming from globalisation, immigration, multiculturalism, and diversity, which have been stoked by liberals too. The discriminatory, racist, nationalist, nativist and Islamophobist rhetoric towards 'others' poses a clear threat to democracy and social cohesion in Europe and beyond. Hence, at the very heart of the rise of right-wing populism lies a disconnection between politicians and their electorates. Right-wing populist parties have gained greater public support in the last decade amid two global crises: the financial crisis and the refugee crisis. The former, combined with neoliberal governance, has created socio-economic deprivation for some Europeans, while the latter has triggered a nostalgic feeling that established notions of identity, nation, culture, tradition, and collective memory are endangered by immigration.

The populist moment has both strengthened many of the former far-right-wing parties and created new ones. Despite national variations, right-wing populist parties are characterised by their opposition to immigration; a concern for the protection of national culture and European civilisation; adamant criticisms of globalisation, multiculturalism, the EU, representative democracy, and mainstream political parties; and the exploitation of a discourse of essentialised cultural difference, which is often conflated with a religious and national difference (Mudde, 2004). The global financial crisis and the refugee crisis of the last decade have accelerated and magnified the appeal of right-wing populism in Europe. However, it would be wrong to reduce the reasons for the populist surge to these two crises.

They have played a role, but they are, at best, catalysts, not causes. After all, if *resentiment* as a sociological concept posits that losers in the competition over scarce resources respond in frustration with diffuse emotions of anger, fear, and hatred, then other processes may well have contributed to generating such resentment, such as de-industrialization, rising unemployment, growing ethno-cultural diversity, terrorist attacks in the aftermath of September 11 and so on (Berezin, 2009).

Consequently, the crisis of representative democracy, compounded by the pervasive pathologies of the neoliberal age and its genuine systemic pressures, has thus created fertile ground for right-wing populism. This, on the other hand, led to an increase in symptoms of affective polarization, which once again directs us to the question of representative democracy. In this regard, some common patterns explain the origins of affective polarization. Affective polarization is mainly related to the increased power of partisanship as a social identity. Individuals view opposing partisans as outgroups, fostering negative sentiments toward them (Iyengar et al., 2019). The term "negative partisanship" focuses on "the disdain for the opposing party which may not necessarily be accompanied by strong in-party attachments" (Bankert, 2021). The intense hostility towards the outparty- the dislike for that party and the unwillingness to ever vote for that party-is called negative partisanship, which plays an essential role in shaping political behavior (Abramowitz and Webster, 2016; Bankert, 2020; Anderson et al., 2022). Secondly, elite-level polarization may trigger affective polarization among the masses. When elites adopt more extreme positions, ordinary partisans respond with heightened negative evaluations of the opposing party and its supporters. Political elites, including elected officials and party leaders, often engage in rhetoric and behavior that can exacerbate affective polarization.

Promoting divisive language and framing political competition as a zero-sum game – such as the right-wing populist rhetoric – deepens emotional and social divides between party supporters (Banda and Cluverius, 2018; Wilson et al., 2020). Moreover, long-term historical and cultural factors also shape affective polarization. Among them, the enduring historically intense political conflicts or ideological divisions may significantly trigger affective political polarization (Boxell et al., 2020). Institutional practices, such as gerrymandering, primary elections, and party-centric legislative processes, can contribute to polarization by incentivizing politicians to adopt more extreme positions. This, in turn, affects the electorate's emotional and social alignment with these positions (Broockman et al., 2023). Electoral systems and party systems also play important roles as determinants of affective political polarization. Proportional representation systems tend to foster multiparty systems, which can reduce affective polarization by providing multiple political choices and reducing the binary opposition typically observed in two-party systems. It also lowers the stakes of elections, as losing doesn't mean total exclusion from power. Hence, the perceived fairness of an electoral system can influence affective polarization. Systems seen as unfair or disproportionately favoring one party can increase group animosity (Fischer et al., 2021; Wagner, 2021; Hernández et al., 2021).

Finally, digital media is also an important determinant of affective polarization. Increased usage of digital media and selective exposure to partisan news amplifies affective polarization by creating an unnatural perception of the behaviors and opinions of other parties' supporters. Accepting biased media frames and selective exposure to ideologically congruent news sources reinforce partisan biases and negative sentiments towards outgroups. Social media especially fosters echo chambers that intensify affective polarization by promoting ingroup favoritism and outgroup hostility (Tsfati and Nir, 2017; Feldman et al.,

2023). In addition to social media, conventional media, and polarized media systems exacerbate the misperceptions about the opposing party's supporters, leading to rising threat perception related to their extremity (Druckman et al., 2021).

In this regard, Maximilian Conrad (2021) explores the intersection of post-truth politics, digital media, and the politicization of migration in the European context. Conrad (2021) delves into how misinformation and disinformation spread through digital platforms have contributed to the politicization of migration issues, particularly in the context of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM). The study investigates the role of digital media in shaping public perceptions and political discourse surrounding migration, highlighting how misinformation campaigns and populist rhetoric have exploited fears and anxieties related to migration. Conrad (2021) argues that the rise of post-truth politics, characterized by the manipulation of emotions and the dissemination of false information, has influenced public opinion and policy debates regarding the GCM. Conrad's research sheds light on the complex relationship between post-truth politics, digital media, and the politicization of migration issues. Similarly, right-wing populist leaders use forms of political communication that are hard to engage with. They tend to use what Jean Baudrillard (2000) would call a kind of *hyper-speech*, which is driven by hyper-reality in the age of social media and post-truth: excessive political speech that is proudly unnuanced, firmly non-dialogical and polemical. This kind of hyper-speech was once defined by a social-democrat politician, Adri Duivensteijn, the former mayor of Almere in the Netherlands, as '*active-non-communication*' to refer to the ways in which Geert Wilders speaks (cited in Jones, 2016: 614).

Populist leaders' rejection of practices of deliberative and dialogical democracy in favour of mono-directional hyper-speech has been very successful in silencing criticism and denying political citizenship to opponents in many countries in Europe and elsewhere. Populist leaders often do not enter into a substantive dialogue with their critics in public or the media, but they simply try to disqualify their opponents as remnants of politically correct, elitist, Europeanist, and multiculturalist polity (Jones, 2016). Many items can be on the agenda of the populist leaders and parties that are conveniently exploitable for their post-truth politics. The denunciation of elites, the strong affection for conspiracy theories, and the dissemination of fake news about migration-related agenda items are just some of those convenient items to be used to provoke the public with lies.

5. Conclusion

As emotional narratives and identities are constructed, mobilized, and contested within various sociopolitical contexts, they increasingly affect the considerations of democratic governance in the era of global neoliberalism. Decision-makers at local, national, and European levels have yet to effectively address and rectify the structural inequalities and injustices that alienate individuals from formal institutions, mainstream political parties, and conventional politics. This, as a result, is generating a growing crisis in political representation as the gap between the rulers and the ruled has significantly grown. The political center, therefore, is significantly decentralized, as the dominance of neoliberal rationality complicates the reassembly of the social fabric. This dissolution of the socio-political sphere, also conceptualized as depoliticization by some scholars, potentially leads to heightened animosity, anomie, radicalism, alienation, and even violent extremism. Individuals subjected to neoliberal governmentality appear increasingly distanced from one another, often along civilizational, religious, and cultural lines. Since neoliberal governmentality generates an intervention within the societal structure and its complexities by undertaking a regulatory

role, it influences every moment and aspect of society through a general regulation of society by the market. Therefore, modern societies seem to be trapped in a Manichean or Cartesian binary mode of thinking, which nurtures right-wing populism and creates fertile ground for affective polarization that exacerbates political discontent. Hence, understanding the emotional underpinnings of political movements and the necessity to address the root causes of sociopolitical grievances has become essential. The interplay of emotions in populism and polarization and the intricate relationship between democracy and disaffection through growing grievances, will continue to affect multifaceted dimensions of democratic governance.

The reviewed literature, therefore, underscores the significant role emotions play in political behaviour and supports it with interdisciplinary theoretical and empirical perspectives. Anger, resentment, and ressentiment are potent drivers of political attitudes, particularly in the context of populist movements, polarization, radicalization, and anti-establishment sentiments; they contribute to the complexity of trust and its implications for contemporary governance, societal cohesion, and individual identities, where such grievances impact the trust and content felt for modern representative democracies. Consequently, democracy in grievance politics undertakes a layered dimension where macro aspects of the structural and socio-political context meet the micro impacts of perceptions, sense-making, belonging, and identity. The existing vast literature considers these dimensions in much depth as this work aimed to scrutinize. From the socio-political context of emotions to the ongoing ressentiment debates, from the structural impacts of neoliberal governmentality to the consequences of rising populism and radicalism, from typologies of polarization to discussions on affective polarization, and towards an integrated analysis of the emotion-based frameworks surrounding these issues—the literature considers the interplay between structure and the individual while incorporating local and global case studies across Europe.

This work also seeks to highlight several common issues frequently emphasized in research regarding the challenges of democratic governance today. The institutional and qualitative shortcomings of democracy appear to exacerbate problems related to political participation and a sense of belonging. Institutions, on the other hand, have a concrete impact on the practical understanding of citizenship, as Offe (2009) suggested. The meeting of perceptions and practices generates a greater problem in greater affective reactions and, hence, a greater concern for both the structural and normative quality of modern democracies. Moving beyond procedural democracy—essentially, to democratize democracy—remains a critical challenge. This concern inevitably brings local issues to the forefront in our increasingly urbanized societies. The reviewed literature collectively emphasizes the importance of spatial and social contexts in shaping identity, belonging, and interactions in diverse environments. The significance of public and third spaces is paramount; thus, contemporary urban policies and local governments serve as essential platforms for implementing tangible measures to address the growing disconnect between individuals and the democratic structure, as well as the resulting crisis in this relationship. Our aim, therefore, should be to cultivate individual cultures while simultaneously inventing new contracts of citizenship—essentially creating a state in which singularity, exceptions, and rarity can coexist under the least oppressive conditions. At this point, it is essential to recall Mouffe's argument of agonism, which can be embraced as a democratic essence. Guattari (1989) characterizes this formation as a logic of the 'included middle,' where black and white blur, the inside merges with the outside, and the 'good' object is intertwined with the 'bad’. This framework also includes a reconsideration of the self about the other.

Different interventions have been developed in various geographies to mitigate the adverse effects of affective polarization. The first type of intervention targets correcting misperceptions about out-partisans' views by providing accurate information. Correcting meta-perceptions or individuals' judgments about how others perceive them is also effective. Several studies show that correcting misperceptions reduces affective polarization. However, these interventions don't guarantee reduced support for undemocratic practices or partisan violence (Voelkel et al., 2023; Lees and Cikara, 2021). The second category of interventions targets creating a friendly environment between different partisan groups and creating positive feelings towards the political outgroup. These befriending interventions can effectively reduce affective polarization between Democrats and Republicans by enhancing positive emotions toward the outgroup (Simonsson et al., 2021). Thirdly, different perspective-taking exercises on social media include exposing participants to out-group feeds and encouraging them to recall disagreements with friends. These exercises, especially in hostile digital environments, help reduce negative sentiments toward outgroups (Saveski et al., 2022). Another intervention to mitigate affective polarization is creating and disseminating counter-narratives on online social media. Quantitative analysis of online discussions around controversial events suggests that counter-narratives by influential actors can reduce affective polarization (Borrelli et al., 2022). Increasing intergroup contact can reduce the adverse effects of affective polarization. Structured or unstructured interactions between opposing group members, such as "democracy cycles", foster mutual understanding and reduce prejudice. Examples of that kind of intervention diminish negative stereotypes and reduce affective polarization (Broockman et al., 2023). Prebunking mitigates affective polarization by inoculating individuals against misinformation and biases before encountering them. This strategy involves correcting misperceptions, strengthening cognitive and affective processes, and promoting perspective-taking, which helps reduce partisan animosity and foster empathy. Studies suggest that pre-emptively addressing false beliefs can mitigate the effects of misinformation and reduce the intensity of partisan emotions (Fernbach and Van Boven, 2022).

Additional empirical research may be needed to explore whether members of contemporary societies can openly share their concerns arising from different forms of deprivation in the spaces of encounter (third spaces – community centers, youth centers, cultural centers, mini-public forums, art workshops, sports fields, dance stages, etc.). It is reported that participants of such gatherings demonstrate more feelings of *hopefulness* and *compassion* about the future, whereas *fear, worry,* and *confusion* became less pronounced as the deliberations and interactions progressed (Leino and Kulha, 2023; Celis and Childs, 2024). The aim in these gatherings could be to identify potential similarities that could foster connection in everyday practices. While measuring democratic performances is crucial, fostering a pluralistic essence in citizenship nowadays requires much attention and, thus, a comprehensive study of educational settings in structure and curriculum. This, on the other hand, could be undertaken more at the local level, in the urban context. Marginalised, neglected, and disenfranchised individuals everywhere have been going through a crisis at home – a detachment from the existing structural positions. While individuals who are more integrated into the socioeconomic and political spheres of everyday life do not experience a great loss of significance as a result of discrimination, alienation, and humiliation, their less integrated peers suffer from isolation, alienation, and loss of significance. Therefore, existing divergences and distinctions within urban settings, local governance, socioeconomic factors, and capabilities may offer valuable insights into understanding and addressing grievances

related to democratic governance. More interdisciplinary research is needed to assess whether the urban spatial constitution, design, policy, and reflexive practices can mediate these interactions and promote vibrant, inclusive communities. The common ground for these questions intersects with the paramount issue of neoliberal governmentality and its subjectivation in our socio-political worlds. In this context, the grievances and emotional responses that arise in nihilistic times highlight the necessity of bridging the universal with the particular in modern democratic governance.

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