Plebiscitary leader democracy in theory and practice:
Looking at populism through Weberian lenses

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The Brexit vote in Great Britain and Donald Trump’s electoral victory in the US presidential elections in 2016 brought a shocking experience for the adherents of liberal democracy. The dramatic political events of 2016 are, however, not without antecedents. The emergence of populism is not a new phenomenon: Cass Mudde (2004) heralded it as a ‘Zeitgeist’ in his 2004 article. Populism and populist leadership first emerged in Latin America, then in East and Central Europe and in Western democracies in the last two decades. Radical and populist parties, movements and politicians have shifted from marginality to mainstream in Austria (Jörg Haider, Norbert Hofer and the Freedom Party), Italy (Silvio Berlusconi, Beppe Grillo), Greece (Syriza), Spain (Podemos), France (Marine Le Pen) and in the Netherlands (Geert Wilders). The concern about the deconsolidation of liberal democracy has characterized the literature dealing with new democracies in East and Central Europe and Latin America. As the vivid public discussion has shown, this concern is now extended to the core states of the Western World (Fukuyama 2016; Foa and Mounk 2016; 2017).

However, from the perspective of contemporary political science literature, the 2016 events are far from surprising and they are, with populism as such, embedded in a wider trend that I call ‘plebiscitary’ to differentiate it from populism as a narrower phenomenon. There is a vast literature on trends which changed the patterns of political behaviour that characterized Western democracies for decades, like the discussion about the decline of political parties and parliaments (XXX), about the growth of volatility in electoral behaviour (XXX), about mediatization (XXX), about personalization of politics (XXX) about the strengthening role of political leaders (XXX), and about the way these trends have impacted the nature of democracy. There is also a massive literature on the crisis of parliamentarism and representation (Crouch 2004; XXX.), as well as on the crisis or the changing role of political parties (Katz and Mair 1995). There has been an underlying and seldom asked question: Are these elements pathologies or ‘shifts’, or components of a wider / deeper paradigmatic change? Writing about the ‘presidentialization’ of European politics, for example, Poguntke and Webb (2005) conceptualize the changes at ‘meso’-level. A few authors, however, have

1 The Northern League, the Alternativa für Deutschland and the Pirate Party of Iceland might be added to the list.
pinpointed a shift to a new era of (representative) democracy, labelled as “audience democracy” (Manin 1997), “post-democracy” (Crouch 2004), “leader democracy” (Körösényi 2005; Pakulski-Körösényi 2012), “plebiscitary leader democracy” (Green 2010) and “populist democracy” (Pappas 2014). Although these works have enriched the scholarly interpretation of the underlying ‘plebiscitary’ trends, they have not changed either the scholarly belief in the stability of liberal democracies or the general liberal democratic interpretative frame.

The 2016 events, however, show that the populist wave has gone further and spread wider than expected, challenging the belief in the stability of liberal democratic regimes. Fukuyama (2016) claims that ‘(T)he triumph of the Trump brand of nationalism is arguably of a piece with authoritarian advances in disparate countries, from Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s Turkey to Viktor Orbán’s Hungary’ and regards it as an advance of populist democracy. Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk (2016; 2017) reveal people’s disengagement in democracy vis-à-vis authoritarian government and are concerned about a deconsolidation of democracy. The spread of populism to the core states of liberal democracy has challenged the prevailing public and social values, the existing institutional order, and liberal democracy itself.

It is not clear yet to what extent the populist trend has transformed liberal democracy and whether the changes will be enduring or produce a turn towards authoritarian rule. However, it is clear by now that theorizing on an illiberal, populist, or even authoritarian turn of liberal democracy is not just an esoteric interest, but has strong empirical relevance even in core states of Western democracies. Therefore, this paper aims to set up a conceptual and theoretical framework to understand and analyse what is happening and what impact contemporary changes might potentially have. It tries to answer the question whether the rise of populism necessarily undermines liberal and/or representative democracy or whether it is compatible with it. It gives a thought experiment on the potential impact of this trend on the nature of the political regime by looking at it through lenses of Max Weber’s theory of (plebiscitarian) leader democracy (in the followings: PLD). Drawing on some previous literature (Körösényi 2005; Green 2010; Pakulski-Körösényi 2012), the paper draws an analogy between the populist trend in contemporary politics and the image of politics in the grounding era of mass democracy observed and presented by Weber.²

(1) Based on this analogy, I will first argue that the Weberian concept of PLD might be enlightening and fruitful for theorizing on the contemporary populist turn, on the underlying ‘plebiscitary’ trend and on their impact on the democratic regime. PLD provides an appropriate means to theorize about this new development (cf. Körösényi 2005; Green 2010; Pakulski and Körösényi 2012). It is closer to the empirical reality of contemporary trends like

² Weber provided a conceptual frame of charismatic leadership and (plebiscitary) leader democracy to grasp the empirical phenomena of emerging mass democracy in Europe and the USA of that period, like growing personalization of politics vis-à-vis a focus on issues and/or principles, the emergence of candidates vis-à-vis political parties, the increasing role of rhetorical charisma or political demagogy in electoral campaigns at the expense of rational deliberation, the emerging direct link between political leaders and the electorate at the expense of mediation by parliamentarism between them (Weber 1978; 1994). The major characteristics of the populist rise since the end of the 20th century have been very similar to the Weberian perception of mass democracy in his age.
the less rational, more emotional and personalized politics, media and political communication than the normative theory of liberal democracy. Drawing on Weber and on a few works in the secondary Weber literature, I will reconstruct a model of PLD to offer a means to compare and analyse different types of political leadership and regimes.

(2) Second, I contend that although Weber’s concept of PLD has a strong heuristic value, it suffers from ambiguities and incoherence (Baehr 2008; Kalyvas 2002). Weber theoretically derived PLD through the routinization of charisma as an ideal-type of legitimate rule. My claim is that due to the ambiguities of Weber’s argument, two different readings of this transformation might be contrasted: an ‘optimistic’ liberal-pluralist and a ‘pessimistic’ populist-plebiscitary one (cf. Körösényi 2009a). The two interpretations produce two versions of democracy (PLD and leaderless democracy) as ideal-types that define an analytical “space” to study empirical cases of regimes and to do comparative research. While the liberal-pluralist type (leaderless democracy) can be used as an appropriate theoretical frame for analysing the party democracy of the post-World War II period and the moderate personalization tendencies that have marked liberal democracies since the 1980s (Manin 1997), I will argue that the populist-plebiscitary type of leader democracy (PLD) is useful for theorizing on the emergence of populist leadership and politics occurring in most recent times. While the former reading might be compatible with the liberal democratic theory and representative democracy, the latter challenges it.

I will argue that the concept of PLD helps us recognize and understand the nature of the regime that might replace liberal democracy if populist politics turn out to be enduring and pervasive. It also helps to reveal the criteria on which the leaning toward liberal-pluralist or populist-plebiscitary type of democracy depends. PLD might prove to be an autocratic rule that contradicts the liberal order but does not necessarily contradict a democratic one.

The paper is structured as follows. First, as a conceptual introduction, it gives an overview about the family resemblance among the concepts of Caesarsim, plebiscitary rule, and charisma in Weber’s works. Second, it briefly reviews the theoretical-conceptual account of the era that has emerged with ‘plebiscitary’ trends in the politics of Western democracies from the 1970s and 1980’s onwards. Third, the paper summarises the traits of charisma as an ideal-type, then reveals the theoretical space that has come into existence due to the routinization of charisma, highlighting the latitude for a shift toward two distinguished authority types, namely PLD and leaderless democracy. Fourth, the paper re-constructs the Weberian model of PLD through presenting and discussing its major features. Having revealed the ambiguities of Weber’s argument, it unfolds the conditions conducive to the move toward PLD. Finally, the paper returns to the questions raised and draws some conclusions.
1. Caesarism, plebiscitary rule, and charisma in Weber’s works

While Weber’s typology of legitimate rule has been highly praised in the scholarly literature, his concept of PLD has been criticized for its Caesarist leanings (e.g. Beetham 1985). From the 19th century political debates onwards, Caesarism has become a Schimpfwort (swearword) referring to Bonapartism, a hybrid of absolutism and universal suffrage (Baehr 2008, 34-38): it was a personal autocratic regime, in which the ruler legitimized his or her rule by referendums.

Peter Baehr (2008, 60, 67-68) explored how Weber liberated Caesarism from the negative connotations of the 19th century discussions through exploring the shift in the understanding of legitimacy in his works. For Weber, Baehr asserted (2008, 86), ‘Caesarism may be deemed legitimate, sociologically speaking, to the extent that people living under its jurisdiction believe in its authority and voluntarily comply with its orders’. Baehr concluded that Weber’s sociological language ‘drains Caesarism, previously a basic political concept, of its normative content’ (88-89). Therefore, Baehr (2008, 60-61) argued that there is a strong family resemblance among the concepts of Caesarism, plebiscitary rule, and charisma in Weber’s works. Due to this dubious origin of the term, the concept of PLD remains normatively suspicious in contemporary literature and is seldom used in political theory. However, this paper will argue that precisely this normative ambiguity and its Caesarist leaning make PLD fruitful to theorize on the populist trend and its implications for contemporary politics.

Before re-constructing Weber’s PLD, in the next section I will briefly review the theoretical-conceptual account of the new era that has emerged with ‘plebiscitary’ trends in the politics of Western democracies from the 1970s and 1980’s onwards.

2. Contemporary interpretations of the new era

Bernard Manin (1997), who is the first to reveal the new, personalized era of Western democracy, distinguishes three successive ideal types of representative government, namely 19th century parliamentarism, 20th century party democracy, and contemporary ‘audience democracy’. Although Manin did not draw on Weber, his ‘audience democracy’ should be seen as a synonym for plebiscitary politics, as Green suggested (2010, 239). He first reveals that the empirical preconditions of rulers’ accountability have faded away to a large extent, however, he is hesitant to draw clear conclusions regarding the normative promises of democracy. Manin argues that even though the people cannot always voice their choices or preferences, they can clearly assess the policy proposals post factum and issue a verdict through retrospective voting (Manin 1997, 183). Colin Crouch (2004), who labels the new era with the term ‘post-democracy’, is more sceptical than Manin and argues that democracy

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3 Even Weber used PLD as a synonym for Caesarism.
4 Weber uses all of them as relational concepts that refer to the relation between ruler and subjects or leader and followers. Baehr reveals that in Weber’s works, ‘Caesarism is translated into and is interchangeable with the jargon of ‘plebiscitary leadership’ and “plebiscitary leader democracy”’. Simultaneously, it becomes absorbed into the concept of charisma’ (Baehr 2008, 60-61).
turns out to be a ‘façade’, i.e. a veil of elite rule. In his account, the growing personalization of electoral politics is a symptom of the loss of content and real issues from politics. He refers to the personalization as a serious flaw of democracy, since personalization accompanied by the commercialization of electoral campaigns is regarded as clear signs of citizens’ growing media manipulation and the decline of rational dialogue in politics. Unlike Manin and Crouch, others draw on Weber’s concepts of charisma, plebiscitarianism and leader democracy to characterise the trends in contemporary politics. András Körösényi theorizes with Weber’s concept of leader democracy, highlighting its implication on the meaning of political representation, then using the concept to characterise the emerging new epoch of Western democracies (Körösényi 2005). In accordance with this, Pakulski and Körösényi (2012) explore leader democracy further as a new era and give a rather optimistic interpretation of it regarding people’s democratic capacity to make incumbents accountable. Leader democracy provides an accountable and responsible government in this account.

Jeffrey Green (2010), who provides the most comprehensive theoretical and insightful analysis of Weber’s plebiscitary democracy, is sceptical about this capacity of the people. In plebiscitary democracy, people can be manipulated by demagogic and populist rhetoric and the accountability of incumbents therefore evaporates. Still it is not a sham democracy in Green’s eyes: people still have some (residual) power - through gaze - , i.e. plebiscitary democracy provides some role for the people in the political process. Körösényi (2009b; 2010), discussing the assumptions and preconditions of accountability in representative democracy and the problem of manipulation, is more doubtful and challenges the accountability theory of representative democracy, in line with Adam Przeworski’s (1999) minimalist conception of democracy.

All of these works discuss the personalization of democratic politics and its implications on the nature of representation and democracy, drawing on Weber’s concept of leader democracy and charisma. While they take the routinization of charisma in a ‘strict’ sense, in which charisma is tamed into personalized but normal politics, Kalyvas (2002), Pappas (2007), Körösényi, Illés and Metz (2016) call attention to the Weberian distinction between normal and extraordinary politics, and the role of agency in this choice. Following them, this paper takes the routinization of charisma in a ‘wider’ or opposite sense, and aims to explore the impact of charismatic leaders on the nature of the political regime in extraordinary times and under revolutionary policies. In contrast to interpreting the routinization of charisma as

5 “Electoral competition then takes the form of a search for individuals of character and integrity. The search is futile because a mass election does not provide data on which to base such assessments”, he notes (Crouch 2004, 28). Post-democracy also indicates a crisis of representation for Crouch.

6 In contrast to Manin, who – relying on Friedrich’s rule – attributes to the people active, autonomous, decision-making roles, Green is sceptical about this capacity of the people. Still it is not a sham democracy in Green’s eyes. Although people’s voice is rendered superficial, they are empowered through gaze, i.e. through watching the leaders’ conduct. In Green’s ocular model of plebiscitary democracy, it is ‘the ideal that the people, not its leadership, control the conditions under which leaders appear on the public stage’. Due to this institutional norm, the principle of candor becomes the ethical ideal of plebiscitary democracy and therefore ‘a necessary condition of any attempt by a leader to generate charismatic authority’ (Green 2010, 130).

7 In my view, Green overrates people’s power. In contrast to his argument, people cannot control the conditions of leaders’ public appearances. It is the stage (public appearances) which is one of the most ‘managed’ arenas/spaces by political leaders and their staff. However, people have power even (or especially) in plebiscitary democracy, which institutionalized the recognition of the charismatic ruler.
taming it into the order of rational-legal order, this paper aims to explore the impact of charisma as a revolutionary force on this order. The paper also intends to explore the conditions on which diverging developments depend.

How can this paper contribute to the study of contemporary populism? It provides a conceptual-theoretical framework (model) to analyse the potential impact of charismatic (populist) political leaders, plebiscitary tendencies, extraordinary political situation and/or crisis discourse, radical/revolutionary aims of changing the prevailing order, demagogy (populist rhetoric), and personalized (and top-down) representation of the political regime. The paper theorizes about the political regime that might (potentially) emerge as the consequence of populist politics.

3. Charismatic authority and its routinization

In his *Economy and Society* (1978), Weber conceptualized (plebiscitary) leader democracy as a routinized version of charismatic authority, therefore we start our analysis with the notion of charisma and charismatic authority. Charismatic authority is one of the three ideal-types of legitimate rule Weber set up. Weber asserted that every genuine form of domination implies a ‘minimum of voluntary compliance’, that is, an interest in obedience, and a ‘belief in its legitimacy’ (1978, 212 and 213). Weber characterizes charismatic authority as follows.

First, in contrast to rational-legal and traditional authority, charismatic authority is based on the concept of charisma. ‘The term “charisma” will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least exceptional powers or qualities. These …are not accessible to the ordinary person, but regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary’, Weber emphasized (1978, 241). ‘(T)he power of charisma rests upon the belief in revelation and heroes…’ (Weber 1978, 1116), but might also rest on a personal mission recognized by the subjects of the charismatic rule. Charisma includes a vision of the future, revealed by the charismatic leader. Second, the actual content of this unusual quality is indifferent, Weber claimed. ‘What is important is how the individual is regarded by those subject to charismatic authority, by his “followers” or “disciples”… It is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of the charisma…’ Weber asserted (1978, 242). Therefore, ‘(i)f proof and success elude the leader for long, …. it is likely that his charismatic authority will disappear’, Weber summarized his point (1978, 242). Where charisma is genuine, however, it is not recognition which is the basis of the claim to legitimacy (Weber 1978, 1113). ‘This basis lies rather in the conception that it is the duty of those subject to charismatic authority to recognize its genuineness and to act accordingly,’ Weber added (1978, 242). Third, ‘(c)harismatic rulership in a typical sense … always results from unusual,

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8 Weber seems to follow a more essentialist approach to charisma in the case of its pure or genuine type, and a more perceptionist one in the case of democratic charisma. In my view, however, the contrast between the essentialist and a perceptionist approach is often overstated. For Weber, the key criterion of the charisma of an individual is his/her ‘…capacity to achieve popular recognition’ (Green 2010, 147), i.e. in this case the essence and perception belong together. In PLD, therefore, charisma is not just manifested, but is created through
especially political or economic situations... It arises from collective excitement produced by extraordinary events and from surrender to heroism of any kind’, Weber argued (1978, 1121).

Fourth, charismatic authority is mostly revolutionary: it is ‘irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules’ or abstract legal principles (Weber 1978, 243-244). The charismatic leader is unbounded by traditional norms as well, and he or she ‘preaches, creates, or demands new obligations’ for the subjects of the authority, as Weber unfolded (1978, 243). Fifth, charismatic authority manifests itself toward the followers or those who are subjected to charismatic authority through revelation and/or the heroic deeds of the person who claims his or her charisma (Weber 1978, 1116). Finally, charismatic authority is always representative. As Hanna Pitkin reveals, Weber, like other authorization theorists, defined representation in terms of authority: ‘they tend to assume that all authority is representative and that every representative is in authority over those for whom he acts’ (Pitkin 1967, 53). Weber claimed that ‘representation’ meant a state of affairs in which ‘...the action of certain members of an organization, the “representatives”, is considered binding on the others or accepted by them as legitimate and obligatory’ (1978, 292).

Since charismatic authority is generated by extraordinary events and/or by an exceptional personality, and since it transcends traditional norms and/or legal order, it generates a rather unstable pattern of rule. Therefore, as Weber emphasized, ‘...all its modifications have basically one and the same cause: The desire to transform charisma and charismatic blessing from a unique, transitory gift of grace of extraordinary times and persons into a permanent possession of everyday life’ (Weber 1978, 1121). Weber called this transformation the routinization of charisma. He took into consideration various causes that engender the routinization of charisma, like the problem of succession under charismatic authority, which generates the instability of rule. The uncertainty in the way of selecting a successors ‘...inescapably channels charisma into the direction of legal regulation and tradition’, Weber argued (1978, 1123).

One way of the routinized version of charismatic authority, which concerns us here, is an anti-authoritarian interpretation of charisma that produces (plebiscitary) leader democracy (Weber 1978, 266-268, 1123 and 1125-1127). PLD is Weber’s subtype of charismatic rule to conceptualize modern mass democracy that emerged from the late 19th century. Weber explored that ‘...’(p)lebiscitary democracy” – the most important type of Führerdemokratie – is a variant of charismatic authority, which hides behind a legitimacy that is formally derived from the will of the governed’ (1978, 268). Weber sometimes called it democratic legitimacy.

The routinisation of charisma and its anti-authoritarian interpretation have crucial implications for the nature of the charismatic structure and the type of legitimacy (Weber 1978, 1121-1123). The ambiguities and tensions that characterise PLD are the consequences of the tension due to the routinisation of charisma, namely, although it ‘...is alien to its electoral victory. Winning the electoral struggle as a heroic deed, or gaining incumbency through acclamation becomes a charismatic quality.
essence, charisma becomes a part of everyday life’ (Weber 1978, 1122-1123). The relation between the charismatic and the rational-legal elements of legitimacy may be divergent: if the charismatic type of legitimacy prevails over the rational-legal type of legitimacy, PLD emerges, while the domination of the rational-legal elements may produce a ‘leaderless’ democracy.

Recently, Ivan Szelenyi (2015) pondered whether Weber introduced democratic legitimacy, derived from the ‘Wille der Beherrschten’ (will of the ruled), as a supplement to his well-known three ideal types of legitimate authority. Since the idea was based on a newspaper report about Weber’s October 1917 lecture in Vienna, published in the Neue Freie Presse, and since Weber never used the concept again when he revised his typology of legitimate rule, Szelenyi finally discarded the idea that Weber actually introduced a fourth type of legitimacy. It was a serious mistake, argues Szelenyi, since this way liberal democracy (the combination of legal-rational authority with ‘Wille der Beherrschten’), the later dominant form of authority, slipped out of the Weberian conceptualization (Szelenyi 2015). In contrast to Szelenyi’s argument, I contend that Weber actually did include a type of authority, namely ‘leaderless democracy’ that more or less corresponds to the later dominant liberal democratic authority. But leaderless democracy is not a fourth ideal-type of legitimacy, since it has its conceptual origin in a combination of two ideal-types of legitimate rule. Leaderless democracy combines rational-legal authority with another variant of the routinization of charisma than PLD: while in the case of PLD, charisma is routinized through regular elections, in leaderless democracy charisma is depersonalized (Weber 1978, 1135, 1143-48.).

To sum up: Weber conceptualized two authority types, PLD and leaderless democracy, which emerged as consequences of the routinization of charisma, using them to unfold the traits of the regimes of his time. He regarded Britain and the USA as examples of PLD, and regarded

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9 The ambiguity and tension within PLD is correctly perceived, but overstated and misinterpreted by Andreas Kalyvas (2002). After making a difference between an individualistic and a collective version of Weber’s notion of charisma, he argues that while the former focuses on the personal attributes of the charismatic leader and the vertical relation between the ruler and the subjects, the latter focuses on values and norms and a horizontal relationship between members of the society. While in the former, charisma is ‘de-radicalized’ and integrated into normal politics, in the latter there is a collective endeavour to transform the norms and values of the society that produces extraordinary politics. In contrast to Kalyvas, this paper assumes that the Weberian notion of charisma is a relational concept, it always has an individualistic and collective sides, therefore a charismatic community cannot be divided / split from a charismatic leader. Hence, this paper aims to explore the role of political leaders in PLD: the question is whether and under what conditions is a leader’s charisma ‘de-radicalised’ and integrated in normal politics, or whether it transforms norms and values and produces revolutionary or revolutionary politics.

10 Depersonalization of charisma is a feature of leaderless democracy. It comes into existence, for example, when charisma is attached to an incumbent of an office, regardless of the persons involved, like in hereditary monarchies (Weber 1978, 1135-1148). But what does depersonalization of charisma explain, if regular elections (which boost the personal struggle among candidates for incumbency) are held? In the case of the German Empire, which is Weber’s example of a leaderless democracy, he explained it with the lack of parliamentary government: the Reichskanzler was responsible only to the Kaiser and not to the Reichstag (REF…..). Hence in Imperial Germany, regular elections for parliament did not become a recruitment channel for the chief executive position, therefore it did not trigger charisma as in democracies, where the chief executive was (directly or indirectly) popularly elected.
Wilhelmine Germany as an example closer to a leaderless democracy (Weber 1978; 1994). My claim is that whereas leaderless democracy corresponds to liberal democracy, PLD provides an appropriate model to theorize about the impact of contemporary populism on democratic politics.

Figure 1. Anti-authoritarian interpretation (routinization) of charisma and its implication on types of authority

4. The major traits of PLD

In the following section, I will review the impact of the routinisation of charisma on the political regime and sketch the major traits of PLD. Six major elements of PLD will be unfolded below. I will highlight a few ambiguities of Weber's argument and the critical theoretical junctions where the argument / ‘development’ diverges into a rational-legal (leaderless democracy) or to a charismatic (PLD) direction, or fluctuates between these two ideal-types. Most liberal democracies in the last three decades might be placed into this ‘in between’ position with a decline of parties and parliaments, moderate personalization, and the emergence of direct linkages between political leaders and the electorate. The conditions favourable for the formation of PLD will be discussed, and finally summarised in a thesis for each aspect of the analysis. Although my argument is mostly theoretical, I will give an empirical example of each feature of PLD.

1. Charismatic leadership

Charismatic leadership in PLD has two distinctive characteristics vis-à-vis the case of pure charisma (charisma as an ideal-type). First, PLD is a routinized and institutionalized version of charismatic authority, which is not without consequences. ‘(I)t is the fate of charisma, however, to recede with the development of permanent institutional structures’, Weber claimed (1978, 1133). In spite of this impact, crises or extraordinary situations and structural factors may regenerate charisma. Weber considered the expansion of democratic voting rights that trigger the mobilization of the masses and the plebiscitary nature of politics. Mass

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11 It is important to note that the anti-authoritarian interpretation of charisma, however, does not produce democratic legitimacy in the sense of an autonomous ideal-type of legitimacy in Weber’s works, since he regarded the ‘will of the people’ as a fiction. Democracy as a regime that eliminates ‘rule of man over men’ is not feasible for Weber, with the exception of direct democracy in small communities. He regarded leaderless democracy as the closest to this ideal.
democracy, as such, gives a demagogic nature to politics and inevitably reproduces charisma as the leader’s personal extraordinariness (Weber 1978, 1449).

We have seen that Weber took into consideration two contrasting tendencies: the bureaucratization and the plebiscitary nature of modern mass politics; PLD is generated from the tension between these contradicting tendencies. PLD is a combination of two authority types, but the internal tension might turn over the ‘balance’ of the two elements and push the regime either towards legal-rational (‘leaderless’) authority, which corresponds to contemporary liberal democratic ideals, or towards the charismatic authority type, which means a shift in an authoritarian direction. The ‘rule of law, not man’ principle falls into the latter category.

According to Weber, the second distinctive characteristic of leadership in PLD is that it ‘…is a variant of charismatic authority, which hides behind a legitimacy that is formally derived from the will of the governed’ (Weber 1978, 268). The citation might be regarded as the core of Weber’s concept of PLD: a conundrum in which all the ambiguities and vagueness of the concept are condensed. Again, there is a tension here between the two contrasting directions of this vague ‘balance’, which triggers various interpretations in the Weber literature.

(1) If it is real or pure charisma, it inevitably contains authoritarian elements / implications, hidden behind democratic and legal forms: the regime in this case leans towards a sham democracy, according to the conventional approach in the literature (XXX….).

(2) In contrast, institutionalization of succession through regular democratic elections may dilute real charisma and substitute it with a kind of ‘manufactured charisma’, as Green (2010, 147, 163) calls it.

In my view, however, PLD does not disintegrate by these internal tensions: its substantive and formal part are strongly interconnected. For Weber, the key criterion of an individual’s charisma is his/her ‘capacity to achieve popular recognition’, as Green himself notes (2010, 147), i.e. the essence and perception belongs together in this case. In PLD, therefore, charisma is not just manifested, but is created through electoral success, i.e. through democratic legitimacy. Winning electoral struggle as a heroic deed, or gaining incumbency through acclamation become charismatic qualities. Since charismatic rule is hidden behind the form of democratic legitimacy, electoral victory is crucial for a charismatic leader. Charisma will be manifested through the triumph over rivals. Heroism in this political struggle becomes the

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12 It depends on their strength whether PLD may get closer to a pure charismatic authority or to a more rational-legal form of legitimacy, where charisma is ‘depersonized’. In the former, the legal and democratic nature of authority becomes only a legal form, while in the latter leaderless democracy comes into existence.

13 My proposition is that leaderless democracy, similarly, might be defined as a variant of rational-legal authority, which hides behind a legitimacy that is formally derived from the will of the governed.

14 Weber is usually thought to have refrained from exploring the relationship between charismatic leadership and democratic institutions (Pappas 2011, 2; cf. Kalyvas 2002).

15 Weber differentiated between pure or genuine and a democratic type of charisma, but unlike a few later authors, he did not regard democratic charisma as pseudo/fake charisma. Weber regarded recognition – through electoral success – as a source of democratic charisma and PLD is a subtype of charismatic rule.
basis of charisma for ‘the dictator of the electoral battlefield’ (Weber 1994, 342). In PLD, unlike in the case of pure charisma, the manifest (electoral) recognition of the leader is constitutive in the making of the leader’s charismatic authority (cf. Green 2010, 147-148). The difference between pure and democratic charisma is summarised in Table 1.

**THESIS 1**: The more the nature of authority is charismatic, the more the legal and democratic nature of rule becomes only a form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charismatic authority</th>
<th>PLD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>charismatic legitimacy</td>
<td>democratic legitimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>authoritarian interpretation of charisma</td>
<td>anti-authoritarian interpretation of charisma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pure (real) type of charisma</td>
<td>routinized (democratic) charisma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=&gt; existed previously (claimed by the pretender)</td>
<td>=&gt; ‘manufactured charisma’ through demagogy in campaign and electoral victory (Green 147, 163-165)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>authority is derived from charismatic claim (and proof/recognition)</td>
<td>authority is derived from the ‘will of the people’ (election has a constitutive role for charisma)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recognition is ‘being treated as a consequence of legitimacy’ (charisma ‘enforces’ recognition)</td>
<td>recognition ‘…is treated as the basis of legitimacy’ (recognition grounds charismatic legitimacy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recognition is a moral duty</td>
<td>recognition is manifested / rejected in elections (recognition grounds charismatic legitimacy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ex post recognition</td>
<td>ex ante recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>essentialist approach to charisma</td>
<td>perceptionist approach to charisma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


An empirical illustration of charismatic leaders in the context of PLD is not an easy exercise. Beyond short references, empirical research on charismatic leaders in democratic contexts is rather rare. Personalisation of politics, personal heroism demonstrated in political struggle, the ‘passionate commitment to a “cause”’, political vision, and political responsibility

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16 The power of charisma ‘rests upon “heroism”…’ Weber explained (1978, 1116).
17 This indicates, however, that charisma in PLD – Green (2010, 147, 163) labelled it as “manufactured charisma” - is different from the ideal type of pure charisma, which is clear in Weber’s argument (Weber…..). As we will see, the manufactured nature of charisma is strongly connected with the plebiscitary nature of PLD and the role of demagogy in mass democracy.
18 Among the exceptions are Michael D. Mumford and his co-authors (XXX) in applied psychology and Takis Pappas (2011; 2016) in political science. Instead of presenting their sophisticated research, I recall Weber’s views and give an example to illustrate the point.
characterises political charisma for Weber (1978, 1116; 1994, 353). However, the core trait of charisma is the pretender’s claim as well as people’s perception of personal superiority. Charles De Gaulle might be regarded as an archetype of the modern charismatic leader, since all these Weberian features are tangible in his political activity (Soós 2015). In addition, in 1958 he was called back to power as the saviour of France in crisis, as Pappas emphasizes (2011).

2. Plebiscitary character

The routinization of charisma has strong implications for legitimacy and for the expression of recognition of authority (see table 1). Three major implications will be pinpointed below. First, PLD is the combination of two forms of legitimate authority, charismatic and rational-legal, where ‘...the recognition by the group becomes an “election”. The personally legitimated leader becomes leader by the grace of those who follow him since the latter are formally free to elect and even to depose him’, Weber explained (1978, 267). The routinization of charisma, i.e. the introduction of formalized elections reinforces the role of recognition in generating authority / legitimacy. While in the pure type of charisma, recognition is ‘being treated as a consequence of legitimacy’, in democratic charisma ‘it is treated as the basis of legitimacy’, therefore Weber calls it ‘democratic legitimacy’ (Weber 1978, 266-67 – emphasis added). While in the pure type of charisma, recognition is a duty of its subject, i.e. charisma ‘enforces’ recognition, in democratic authority charisma, manifested through election, it grounds legitimacy. That means, in PLD, it is electoral support itself that creates legitimacy.

Looking at the empirical level, populist leaders always refer to people’s will and/or to their electoral majority. PLD is majoritarian; its legitimacy is derived from the majority of the votes. Maybe that is why Donald Trump could not accept that it was Hilary Clinton rather than himself who won the popular vote in the 2016 US presidential election. As D. Smilov and Ivan Krastev (2008, 8) note, ‘new populism does not represent a challenge to democracy understood as free elections or as the rule of the majority.’ And ‘...the new populists like elections’. ‘What they oppose is the party-based representative nature of modern democracies, the protection of minorities’ rights, and any constraints on the sovereignty of the people’.

Second, elections replace acclamation as the means of expressing recognition. The anti-authoritarian interpretation of charisma has produced a shift from occasional acclamation of charismatic rulers to their regular elections with standardized suffrage, as Weber noted (1978, 266-67). Election itself is an aristocratic method with meritocratic impact on the selection of leaders (Manin 1997, 150), but electoral struggle in mass democracy elevates this impact to a much higher intensity.

20 Pappas (2016) finds that of 45 populist European party leaders, only five are found to be charismatic, namely Jean-Marie Le Pen, Andreas Papandreou, Jörg Haider, Silvio Berlusconi and Viktor Orbán.

21 What is crucial for my analysis is that in the case of pure charisma it is not recognition which is used as the primary basis for the claim to legitimacy, but inner moral duty. In contrast, in the case of the routinized version of charisma, i.e. in PLD, recognition becomes the primary basis of the claim to legitimacy. That is why Weber called it democratic legitimacy (1978, 266-67). As Weber formulated, “…when the charismatic organization undergoes progressive rationalization, it is readily possible that, instead of recognition being treated as a consequence of legitimacy, it is treated as the basis of legitimacy: democratic legitimacy” (Weber 1978, 266-67).
While acclamation or its modern version, plebiscite, is the means of expressing acknowledgement that ‘the pretender actually has charisma’ (1978, 1123), free elections in a modern sense, in contrast, provide real choice among candidates in a representative system (Weber 1978, 1127).

Besides elections and plebiscite, Weber regarded acclamation as a different means of recognising the ruler’s legitimacy (see table 2). For him, plebiscite means direct popular decision making or, in other words, the popular vote. Plebiscite implies a yes or no choice, accepting or rejecting a proposition to vote on. Plebiscite then means formalized elections, which however are not genuinely ‘free’. They mean the recognition or rejection of the person with charismatic qualities who exercises the power of the ‘pretender to the throne’ who demonstrates similar features (Weber 1996: 219-221). For Weber, plebiscite is one of the means of modern (routinized) charismatic rule/authority that applies democratic forms. The leader gains and legitimizes his power through plebiscite (Weber 1978: 267).

Table 2. Means of expressing recognition in different authority types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaderless democracy</th>
<th>PLD</th>
<th>Charismatic authority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>free election</td>
<td>plebiscite</td>
<td>acclamation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>election means real choice between candidates</td>
<td>pretender is acknowledged through plebiscite</td>
<td>acceptance of charismatic leader expressed through acclamation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>referendum as issue-vote</td>
<td>referendum as a means of expressing recognition</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If charismatic domination prevails, Weber’s argument goes on, elections turn out to be only (procedural) forms, i.e. a plebiscite. As Weber noted, ‘We are not all dealing with an election, of course, when voting for a political ruler has a plebiscitary and hence charismatic character: when instead of a real choice between candidates only the power claims of a pretender are being acknowledged” (1978, 1129 - italics are mine – AK). In this case, the substantive difference among election, plebiscite and acclamation vanishes (Weber 1978, 1126-7 and 1133-1134; c.f. Baehr 2008).

On the empirical level, I try to clarify my point with two examples. First, we may take Schumpeter’s argument on the macro political level. Schumpeter (1987, 271), who at this point draws heavily on Weber, claims that electoral competition for votes only technically differs from acclamation: since essentially both are consequences of a ‘tacit acceptance.’. In a realistic world, Schumpeter argues, there is ‘… unfair” or “fraudulent” competition or

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22 Ironically, it is election, as an anti-authoritarian form, which legitimizes (the) authoritarian (charismatic) authority/rule.

23 At another place he wrote: ‘(T)he plebiscite is not an “election”, but the first or renewed recognition of a pretender as a personally qualified, charismatic ruler’ (Weber 1978, 1126; cf. Weber 1978, 1451-53).

+ ‘…the specifically Caesarist technique is the plebiscite. It is not the ordinary vote or election, but a profession of faith in the calling of him who demands the acclamations’ (Weber 1978, 1451)
restraint of competition’. In contrast to the concept of competitive elections, there is no real choice, but recognition that the leader prevails / has a dominant position. Second, on the level of individual political leaders, if we look at the elections and referendums of de Gaulle, Chavez, Orbán or Erdogan, we see that they served as a means of the recognition of their charismatic rule. More generally, political leaders of this populist age (Mudde 2004) often use other plebiscitary means like intra-party referendums (Tony Blair), so called ‘national consultations’ (Viktor Orbán), or electoral primaries (France). To sum up: The anti-authoritarian interpretation of charisma provides latitude for a development either toward a competitive (potentially leaderless) democracy or toward PLD. While free and competitive elections correspond, at most, to competitive (liberal) democracy, plebiscite corresponds to PLD. The former may include leaderless democracy (or a personalization of politics to a moderate extent, without being charismatic), and the legal-rational authority type prevails with the combination of the ‘Wille der Beherrschten’. In contrast, the plebiscitary rule or PLD transforms into a form of charismatic rule.

THESIS 2: The more charismatic domination prevails, the larger the extent to which (formally free) elections shift towards being (substantially) a plebiscite or even acclamation.

3. Crisis situation

As we have seen above, charisma is usually connected to an unusual or crisis situation. Pure ‘charisma… is immediately activated whenever an extraordinary event occurs’, Weber noted (1978, 1134). Only with particular abilities and heroism is it possible to control unusual situations, when the normal everyday routine is no longer sufficient. ‘(O)nly extraordinary conditions can bring about the triumph of charisma over the organization’, Weber asserted (1978,1132). Unlike in normal times, in ‘times of great public excitement’ charismatic leaders are even able to control the party (Weber 1978, 1132).

We have seen in Weber’s logic extraordinary situations trigger extraordinary leadership. It is less clear, however, to what extent the routinization of charisma changes this relationship between unusual situations and the appearance of charisma. Weber’s argument is somewhat ambiguous here, which provides room for different interpretations.

24 And ‘(B)etween this ideal case which does not exist and the cases in which all competition with the established leader is prevented by force, there is a continuous range of variation within which the democratic method of government shades off into the autocratic one by imperceptible steps.’ (Schumpeter 1987, 271).
25 It is to be noted that in addition to using plebiscite as a means of succession, plebiscitary (charismatic) leaders – see for example Charles de Gaulle, Hugo Chavez or Viktor Orbán – also use plebiscite in its original sense, as referendum (direct vote on a specific issue), in order to strengthen and/or demonstrate their popular legitimacy. In the ideal-type of PLD, plebiscite is first of all a means to provide the legitimacy of rule.
26 We may conclude that plebiscitary democracy and charismatic leadership are close and mutually strengthen each other. However, if the democratic element prevails and charisma is depersonalized through the pre-eminence of political parties (which represent rational interests and issue-positions) competing for power, the regime leans toward leaderless democracy. Weber contrasted party democracy and PLD.
The activation of charisma is not expected to happen very often in the age of predictability, bureaucratic rule and disenchantment of the world, in which legal-rational authority prevails. Along this line, Andreas Kalyvas claims that Weber finally ‘de-radicalized charisma’, and it became ‘integrated and neutralized into normal politics and reduced to the plebiscitarian and demagogic powers of a democratically elected executive’ (Kalyvas 2002, 98-99). Even if Kalyvas’s account seems exaggerated, it is noteworthy that most of Weber’s examples of modern plebiscitary politicians like Gladstone, Lloyd George or the presidential candidates of the USA, are inevitably examples of normal politics. However, I will argue below that Weber did not abandon the possibility of the emergence of genuine charisma in modern democracies and revealed a number of conditions that foster such development. Following the Weberian logic and going beyond his original arguments, I will provide two arguments below.

First, precisely this stability and predictability of bureaucratic rule made Weber search for room for manoeuvre for political leaders. As Kari Palonen highlights, political leaders in Weber’s account may open new horizons for political action and challenge the status quo through ‘operative contingency’ (Palonen 1998). While crisis is usually regarded as an exogenous shock, political leaders themselves might generate crisis or the sense of crisis endogenously in the ‘Weberian moment’ through crisis discourse or performance (Palonen 1998; Moffitt 2015; Körösényi, Illés and Metz 2016). And if crisis (or its mood) has been generated, the need for a charismatic leader is more obvious. Takis Pappas (XXX…n.d.) also emphasizes that charismatic leadership may emerge in times of political normalcy and relative institutional stability, including liberal democracy. They are creative political entrepreneurs who trigger radical mobilization in democracy through the mechanism of symbolic framing / narratives, and generates charismatic leadership through agency (Pappas 2008). The ‘constitutional game’ played by the role French president de Gaulle in 1962, President G.W. Bush’s after 9/11 or the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s unorthodox financial policy from 2010 onwards are illuminating empirical examples of this stratagem to widen the political leaders’ room for manoeuvre (Körösényi, Illés and Metz 2016).

(2) Second, structural factors, like regular elections, may also regenerate charisma through mass mobilization by political leaders and plebiscitary politics, as Weber underlined. In spite of the fact that elections are regular and institutionalized, they break the constancy of the legal-rational authority – i.e. bureaucratic stability and predictability of laws and regulations –

27 He emphasizes that Weber abandoned the collectivist aspect and the founding dimension of charismatic politics and reduced it to ‘crippled form of charismatic plebiscitarian leader’, i.e. to ‘plebiscitarian and demagogic powers’ (Kalyvas 2002, 98 and 102-3). Kalyvas’s view is in accordance with the argument that contrasts the pseudo-, fake- or ‘manufactured’ charisma of modern PLD to pure or genuine charisma. In my view, this contrast is overstated. Although Weber emphasizes that manufactured, i.e. routinized charisma was generated differently, since unlike in the case of pure charisma, recognition plays a crucial role in it, but he did not differentiate between them in a substantive sense.

28 Cf. Pappas (2011, 2016) carries out empirical research on charismatic leaders in ‘normal’ times of contemporary pluralist democracies.

29 ‘As domination congeals into permanent structures, charisma recedes as a creative force and erupts only in short-lived mass emotions with unpredictable effect, during elections and similar occasions...’ noted Weber (1978, 1146).
through, first, generating charismatic legitimacy by *ex ante* recognition and second, bringing political contingency into this process. By the latter I mean that although elections cannot be regarded as crises, they have a kind of ‘extraordinariness’ in two senses. First, to a certain extent they ‘break’ the permanency and predictability of governance and public policy. Second, the electoral campaign with its mobilization capacity often polarises views and generates bitter antagonism among candidates, which may raise the stake of the elections in an extreme way. The choice between different political visions often seems to be ‘systemic’, like choice between capitalism and socialism, between liberalism and etatism, or between democracy and authoritarianism. Defeating rivals in this struggle often perceived as an extraordinary or heroic achievement - what Weber regarded as a source of charisma\(^30\), therefore electoral success, as a basis of legitimacy (recognition) may play a part in (re-)generating charisma.

For an example of the role of elections in generating charisma, recall the elections of Margaret Thatcher, who reduced the stake of the electoral campaign as a choice between Socialism and freedom (capitalism), or take the recent US presidential election of Donald Trump, who emerged as a charismatic leader during the campaign, using symbolic framing and crisis narratives and elevated the stake of elections to the highest level.

THESIS 3: The more the actual political situation is regarded as extraordinary,
(a.) the easier it becomes to emerge as a charismatic leader;
(b.) the stronger the role of electoral success (recognition) as a basis of legitimacy; and
(c.) the more revolutionary (therefore voluntarist) policy becomes legitimate.

4. (Revolutionary) policy and politics

Writing about pure charisma, Weber emphasized that ‘(T)he bearer of charisma enjoys loyalty and authority by virtue of a mission believed to be embodied in him; this mission has not necessarily and not always been revolutionary, but in its most charismatic form it has inverted all value hierarchies and overthrown custom, law and tradition….’ (Weber 1978, 1117).\(^31\) A crisis or extraordinary situation helps to legitimize revolutionary politics and policies even in PLD: the primacy of politics prevails over rule of law and bureaucratic norms. Rule becomes arbitrary, but this arbitrariness is justified and/or concealed by charismatic legitimacy.

In PLD a charismatic leader provides a ‘politics of faith, using Oakeshott’s term (1996) or a ‘redemptive vision’ of democracy, in Canovan’s (1999) formulation. Charismatic leaders are populists in the sense Canovan uses the term: they give the promise of a better world through action by the sovereign people, i.e. they promise salvation through politics *within* the democratic system (Canovan 1999, 9-11; cf. Arditi, 2004). Charismatic leaders create a

\(^{30}\) ‘…(t)he power of charisma rests upon the belief in the revelation and in heroes…’, wrote Weber (1978, 1116).

\(^{31}\) C.f. ‘…in a revolutionary and sovereign manner, charismatic domination transform all values and breaks all traditional and rational norms… “It has been written…, but *I* say unto you”…’. (Weber 1978, 1115).
shared social identity (Mumfird 2006) and have a transformational character, as James MacGregor Burns points out in his leadership typology (1978).

However, my claim is that in PLD a tension may arise between charismatic and legal-rational principles of legitimacy. While in pure charismatic authority the ruler ‘...has inverted all value hierarchies and overthrown custom, law and tradition’ (Weber 1978, 1117), in PLD these revolutionary politics and policies are constrained by a formal legitimacy of rule, especially in the long-run. This tension may appear in different ways. PLD allows a range of politics and policies from a (temporary) dominance of charismatic authority with revolutionary politics and/or policies to the taming of charisma by electoral democracy and by the rule of law. However, a certain level of political radicalism is a feature of PLD even in the latter case. A well-known example of this tension is the reconstructive leadership of Franklin D. Roosevelt, which was constrained and delayed by the Supreme Court before Roosevelt was able to pack the court with new judges. Or taking another example: Donald Trump again condemned the judiciary which blocked his radical executive measure on the immigration ban from selected Muslim countries.

Although in PLD legal-rational rule and bureaucracy cannot entirely resist the primacy of politics and policies, but the legal legitimation of rule requires that revolutionary politics should take on a positive legal form in the long-run. Taking Weber’s favourites as examples, it means that Gladstone and Lloyd George governed through their political control over the parliamentary legislation. Beside legislation, the plebiscitary ruler in PLD commands bureaucracy, but (s)he also relies on it at the same time. (S)he does not abolish its operation and its legalism, but (s)he may temporarily constrain and surpass it to a smaller or larger degree.

Upholding the leader’s charismatic image needs a permanent sense of crisis and/or revolutionary politics and policies, even if it is generated through discursive means or symbolic framing (Pappas 2008) Therefore, in PLD there is a strong drive to a permanent crisis narrative and revolutionary policy and/or politics in one or more sectors or policy fields. It is not accidental that charismatic leaders with revolutionary/radical policy programs, like Thatcher, Chavez, Trump, Orbán, or Erdogan exploit crises or use a persuasive crisis narrative to legitimate their radical measures.

Revolutionary goals and attitudes also raise the stakes of politics. The most extreme case of revolutionary politics is the foundation of a new regime. Unlike Kalyvas (2002, 73) assumes,

32 Together with personalism, Pappas (2016) regards radicalism as a distinct trait of charismatic leadership. Radicalism is in between reformist and revolutionary politics and policies.

33 Kalyvas (2002) contrasts an individualistic and a collective (and hence impersonal) version of Weber’s concept of charisma and argues that while the former focuses on the personal attributes of the charismatic leader and the vertical relation between the ruler and the subjects, the latter focuses on values and norms and a horizontal relationship between members of the society. While in the former, charisma is ‘de-radicalized’ and integrated into normal politics, in the latter the collective endeavour to transform the norms and values of society produce extraordinary politics. In contrast to Kalyvas, this paper aims to explore the role of political leaders in PLD, i.e. the question is whether and under what conditions the leader’s charisma is ‘de-radicalised’ and
Weber did not exclude the politics of ‘striving to attain the impossible’, i.e. risk-taking political agency challenging the constraints of the status quo through creative action, but quite the contrary (Palonen 1998).34 His example of a plebiscitary leader is one who managed to ‘overthrow custom, law and tradition’ and founded a new regime: Napoleon III (Weber 1978, 267, 1149), who after dissolving the National Assembly, ruled through imperial decrees. There are a few examples of regime founders in modern democratic politics in the sense of how Stephen Skowronek (1997) used the notion, among charismatic politicians, including F.D.Roosevelt, de Gaulle, Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, Viktor Orbán and R.T. Erdogan. They built political regimes through their ‘transformational’ (Burns 1978), ‘reconstructive’ (Skowronek 1997) or inspirational leadership (Nye 2008), which can be understood and described through the conceptual-theoretical frame of PLD.35

THESIS 4: The more charismatic domination prevails,
(a.) the stronger politics and policies gain a revolutionary and voluntarist (hence authoritarian) character;
(b.) the stronger politics prevail ( politicization) over rules, norms and customs.

5. Demagogy

While the pure charismatic leader expresses his or her extraordinary quality through revelation or prophecy and it is the moral duty of the people to follow him, in PLD the routinization of charisma through regular elections requires from leaders permanent communication with and mobilization of the people. Weber revealed that leaders’ demagogy gains a key role in this process. In contrast to the age of early parliamentarism, the extension of the franchise required from candidates to fight for votes, therefore in Weber’s account political leadership inevitably became demagogic: ‘Democratization and demagogy belong together...’ (1978: 1450). The demagogue with the charisma of rhetoric directly addressed the people (Weber 1978: 1126). As opposed to the more rational and objective tone and argumentation in early parliaments, rhetoric in mass politics stirs emotions and leans toward demagogy, toward the ‘the exploitation of the emotionality of the masses’ and makes the content of the rhetoric less significant, as Weber explored (1994: 343; 1978: 1129-1130)36. He contended that Periclean democracy and late 19th century Great Britain were both characterized by plebiscitary democracy and by the rule of demagogic political leaders (Weber 1994: 331, 343-344; c.f. Manin 1997). A charismatic or plebiscitary leader, unfolded Weber, ‘...gains the trust and faith of the masses in him and his power with the means of demagogy’ (Weber 1978, 1451).

34 Weber claimed that ‘...what is possible would never have been achieved if... people had not repeatedly reached for the impossible’ (Weber 1994, 369).
36 ‘The more mass effects are intended and the tighter the bureaucratic organization of the parties becomes, the less significant is the content of the rhetoric’, Weber observed (1978, 1129-1130).
However, Weber provided a rather ambiguous account of demagogy. In contrast to conventional usage, he used the notion of demagogy not only in a negative, but also in a positive sense (Weber 1978, 1449-1451; cf. Green 2010, 163-165). For him demagogy is not only a rhetorical means of simplification, manipulation, deception, stirring emotions, targeting scapegoats, etc. But demagogy, as a ‘charisma of rhetoric’, may also have the positive meaning of a capacity of gaining the trust of the masses through a political struggle for national leadership, in which each of them is ‘exposed to public scrutiny through the criticism of opponents and competitors and can be certain that, in the struggle against him, the motives and means of his ascendancy will be ruthlessly publicized’ (Weber 1978, 1450). The ‘craft of demagoguery’ includes not only a rhetorical capacity, but intellect and character in Weber’s account (1978, 1450). In Weber’s account, demagogy in the struggle for votes becomes a part of leadership selection.

On the empirical level of contemporary politics, the populist style, an emotional tone instead of rational/technocratic arguments and the simplification of complex issues to the language of ordinary citizens might be regarded as the contemporary equivalent to Weber’s concept of demagogy. Since populist and plebiscitary politicians aim to build direct links to the people and directly target the people with their rhetoric, they have broken with the sophisticated language of the political class and have started to use the simple language of ordinary people, as a comparative study underscores for example in the case of Berlusconi and Orbán (Körösényi and Patkós 2017). The radical or revolutionary political aims motivate populist and plebiscitary leaders to use a divisive rhetoric, frame political conflicts in identity politics and contrast themselves as representatives of the people to the old, privileged political class and/or elite that is trying to defend the status quo. The challenge of ‘the orthodoxy of the day’ in public policy and of the ruling political paradigm foster a dichotomous political world view, in which politics is divided into the defenders of the status-quo (‘They’) and the challengers (‘We’). The building of a new type of relationship with the people and the application of the tools of direct democracy, like referendums (de Gaulle, Chavez, Orbán) and/or other plebiscitary means also instigate the ‘charisma of rhetoric’. The personalization of politics does not necessarily lead to the disappearance of issues from electoral campaigns. In the 2016 US Presidential race, for example, Republican and Democratic nominees differed sharply on almost every major policy issue — trade, immigration, climate change, minority rights, and health care, to name a few. The novelty is the interpretation and framing of these issues, which strikingly deviate from the conventional.

THESIS 5: The more demagogy plays an important role in leaders’ rhetoric and in political communication,
(a.) the more democratic politics / political struggle is about personalities rather than about parties and/or policy-issues,
(b.) the stronger leaders can shape or manipulate the ‘will of the people.’

37 This ‘public scrutiny’ gives people’s power in Green’s (2010) ocular model of plebiscitary democracy.
6. Representation

As we have seen, Weber like other authorization theorists, defined representation in terms of authority and claimed that by ‘representation’ he meant a state of affairs in which ‘…the action of certain members of an organization, the “representatives”, is considered binding on the others or accepted by them as legitimate and obligatory’ (1978, 292). Regarding the subject of representation, however, Weber followed the conventional approach and focused on representative bodies like national assemblies or parliaments as intermediaries between citizens and government (1978, 292-299 and 1128-30) and missed directly elected chief executives like the American president. In contrast, following Weber’s definition of representation, I argue that in PLD the (quasi-)directly elected chief executive is the representative of all citizens and/or the whole nation. If this is so, the emergence of charismatic or plebiscitary leaders changes the nature of democracy and representation in three crucial respects. First, as Körösényi (2005) explores, the subject of representation is different: the emphasis shifts from a parliamentary representation of diversity to the plebiscitary ruler that represents the people and also occupies the incumbent position (c.f. Manin 1997). The people are represented by the directly (or de facto directly) elected leader, who is the actual head of the executive, rather than by parliament or another chamber or representative body (Weber 1978: 266-268). Second, bottom-up representation is replaced by top-down representation (cf. Körösényi 2005). As Weber explored when writing about representation in modern democratic settings, ‘(A)ll attempts at subordinating the representative to the will of the voters’ are useless. What he regarded as representation inevitably produces a top-down relation between the representative and his voters (1978, 1128). While in traditional parliamentarism representation meant representation before the monarch, or in other words, the representation of orders and constituencies (and the German Imperial Assembly embodying religious, class and group representation) was also based on the bottom-up logic, in modern plebiscitary democracies representation assumes a primarily top-down character. Third, the plebiscitary leader controlling the executive power obtains a free mandate, i.e. election means a blind authorization for governance, which is in accordance with Weber’s authorization theory of representation. It follows that ‘[t]hey tend to treat the representative not as the servant but as the chosen “master” of his voters. Most constitutions express this in the formula that the representative – like the monarch – is free to decide as he sees fit and that he “represents the interests of all the people”’ Weber argued (1978, 1128).

To sum up: representation in PLD is a combination of (indirect) parliamentary representation and (direct) representation in a charismatic authority, and the relation between the two contrasting kinds of representation is not balanced. Charismatic or plebiscitary leaders are the primary representatives of the people. It is a paradox of PLD that plebiscitary leaders who speak in the name of the people embody a top-down representation.

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38 Where people elect not only parliament but also the actor representing the whole nation or political community, there (s)he is the one that becomes the people’s primary representative.
39 Drawing on an analogy with the contrast between the Caesarist and parliamentary principle, Weber contrasted plebiscitary and parliamentary democracy (1978, 1451-1453).
The changing nature of representation over the last three-four decades is visible on the empirical level. The presidentialization research has unfolded that in most Western democracies, chief executives and leaders who compete for this position get into the centre of electoral campaign, they are strengthened within their political party and are elected within the executive and government (Poguntke and Webb 2005). This development is partly the consequence of the plebiscitary nature of contemporary politics. I will illustrate the shift of representation to the (de facto) directly elected chief executive through a negative and a positive example. The negative example is the European Union that, having a faceless organizational structure, is unable to present a legitimate representative in spite of the fact that it has various representative bodies. The positive one is the USA, where the election of Donald Trump as President triggered a series of comments and analyses predicting the decline of American democracy in an authoritarian direction, in spite of the continuity in the nature and working of the major representative institution, the Congress.

THESIS 6: The stronger the representative role of the (the incumbent) charismatic leader vis-à-vis the representative role of parliament or national assembly, the more likely representation is to be a top-down, plebiscitary, and therefore authoritarian relationship.

Table 3 Three types of representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parliamentary representation</th>
<th>Party representation</th>
<th>Plebiscitary representation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>parliamentary representation or ‘purely representative government’ (293-295)</td>
<td>party government (294)</td>
<td>plebiscitary leadership (e.g. ‘elective presidency’ – Weber 1978, 295)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>representatives (deputies) have free mandate</td>
<td>deputies are controlled by their party organization or chief (voluntarist intervention of the parties)</td>
<td>plebiscitary leader has a free mandate, (s)he represent the whole nation, (s)he reveals the will of the nation/people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>each expresses his own genuine conviction</td>
<td>follows the party line (294)</td>
<td>demagogy (w1978; 1994) =&gt; (s)he formulates the will/interest of the people (what /s/he should represent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exclusion (‘exclusion of publicity’ 295)</td>
<td>combination of exclusivity and publicity</td>
<td>publicity (outside parliament)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tendency to impersonality 294</td>
<td>parties prevail over deputies</td>
<td>personalization (W1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>representation by intermediary institutions</td>
<td>patronage parties</td>
<td>direct link, election =&gt; personalized representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deliberation</td>
<td>partocracy / party oligarchy</td>
<td>demagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>free mandate =&gt; top-down representation… (but rational justification40)</td>
<td>more bottom-up, since parties represent classes, social or opinion groups</td>
<td>free mandate =&gt; top-down representation… (justification through rhetoric of charisma / demagogy)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


40 Justification is needed historically: only in parliament, i.e. horizontally. In deliberative theory or in the Habermasian model, rational justification is needed vis-s-vis society, i.e. vertically as well.
The main features of PLD and leaderless democracy

To sum up: this section has presented the main features of PLD and leaderless democracy as ideal-types in a comparative way (summarized in table 4). Leaderless democracy comes into existence when the routinization of charisma produces a depersonalized regime, in which rational-legal legitimacy/authority prevails. Political leaders play a marginal role in this authority type. Leaderless democracy can be distinguished by normal, low stakes politics, free and competitive elections, rational argumentation and/or bargaining among political actors and descriptive, bottom-up representation. Contemporary liberal democracies look very similar to the authority type of leaderless democracy. Even a certain level of personalization of politics may be compatible with this authority type if rational issue-politics and/or interest-based politics prevail. In contrast, PLD as an ideal-type has rather different features along all the components of authority. Political entrepreneurs/leaders gain chief executive positions and have a crucial role in the political process (cf. Körösényi 2009a; Green 2010). Politics is strongly personalized and charisma is ‘manufactured’ in the political struggle of plebiscitary democracy. Elections turn into plebiscites, and recognition is treated as the basis of legitimacy, therefore winning elections is crucial for plebiscitary leaders. Political conditions are extraordinary, or perceived are as such, due to an exogenous shock or an endogenously generated crisis and/or crisis discourse. In addition, high stakes revolutionary politics and policies characterize PLD with a strong role of demagogy as a means of mass mobilization and political struggle. Representation in PLD is distinguished by the prevalence of the authorization theory and the primacy of the top-down relationship.

Table 4. Major traits of authority types of routinized charisma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority type</th>
<th>Leaderless democracy</th>
<th>PLD</th>
<th>Charismatic authority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. nature of charisma</td>
<td>depersonalized¹ charisma</td>
<td>routinized/ ‘manufactured’ charisma (personalised)</td>
<td>pure charisma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>legitimacy of rule</td>
<td>rational-legal (and democratic)</td>
<td>combination of charismatic and legal-rational (= charismatic authority hides behind formally democratic legitimacy)</td>
<td>charismatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>basis of legitimacy</td>
<td>formal rules</td>
<td>recognition of the person (electoral success)</td>
<td>inner moral duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. role of recognition</td>
<td>acceptance of formal rules</td>
<td>recognition ‘…is treated as the basis of legitimacy’ (democratic legitimacy !)</td>
<td>recognition is ‘being treated as a consequence of legitimacy’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expression of recognition</td>
<td>free election (choice)</td>
<td>turn free election towards plebiscite (consent)</td>
<td>tacit consent or acclamation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. situation</td>
<td>normal</td>
<td>crisis narrative / (generated) crisis</td>
<td>crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stake of politics (election)</td>
<td>low stake</td>
<td>high stake (tendency to be raised by revolutionary politics)</td>
<td>high stake</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ rational politics (preference or interest based)
4. policy / politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>normal</th>
<th>combination of normal and/or unusual</th>
<th>unusual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

5. means of convincing followers

| rational argumentation and/or bargaining | demagogy | revelation |

6. representation

| bottom-up | top-down representation prevails over bottom-up | top-down |

| parliament has representative role | shift of representative role from parliament to chief executive | the charismatic ruler is representative |

5. Conclusion / Discussion

In this final section I will offer conclusions of my paper. I hope my research makes some contribution to the field in three different respects: firstly, to the Weber-research; secondly, to the empirical and/or comparative research on contemporary populism and its impact on the political regime; and thirdly, to democratic theory.

1. Contribution to the Weber-research

First, I have highlighted in this paper that Weber’s concept of charisma and his argument on its routinization are rather ambiguous: the routinization of charisma might produce different authority types, like PLD and leaderless democracy. They might be located at two opposite ends of a continuum with variations in between. First, I have demonstrated that the anti-authoritarian interpretation (routinization) of charisma does not necessarily produce PLD. Second, I unfolded that the emergence of PLD depends on certain empirical tendencies along the six components / features of authority type (see table 4) as well as on certain shifts in the conditions of PLD (table 5, see in Appendix), which I exposed through the ‘pessimistic’ reading of Weber. My conclusion is that the more these conditions are met, the closer the given regime is to the ideal-type of PLD.

2. Contribution to empirical and comparative research

I conclude from the previous section of the paper that, in contrast to leaderless democracy, PLD serves as an appropriate model for the analysis of contemporary populist politics and its impact on the political regime. We have seen that the concept of PLD helps us recognize and understand the nature of the regime which might replace liberal democracy if populist politics were enduring and pervasive. The major traits of PLD provide a conceptual frame to grasp and analyse many empirical attributes of populist politics, like personalisation of politics, the emergence of leaders, plebiscitary politics and crisis and/or discourse, high stake (revolutionary) politics, political radicalism and unorthodox policies, divisive rhetoric and enemy-construction through symbolic-framing and the claim of representation of the people’s will (see Table 6 in Appendix). The politics of populist-plebiscitary leaders like Charles de Gaulle, Hugo Chavez, Jean-Marie Le Pen, Andreas Papandreou, Jörg Haider, Silvio
Berlusconi, Viktor Orbán, Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Vladimir Putin can be understood and described by the model of PLD (cf. Pappas 2016; Körösényi 2017).

3. Contribution to democratic theory

Finally, I return to the questions raised at the beginning of this paper regarding the potential implications of a populist upsurge on liberal democracy. The first question is whether the rise of populism necessarily undermines liberal (and representative) democracy or whether it is compatible with it. It is widely accepted in the literature that the populist rise, accompanied with a broader transformation of politics in Western democracies, might challenge liberal democracy. The contribution of this paper to the field is that it provides a conceptual model of PLD to theorize on this problem and to contribute to a more grounded answer. We have seen that the model of PLD, reconstructed through a pessimistic reading of Weber, challenges leaderless (and liberal) democracy. Legal-rational authority (e.g. the rule of law) is constrained or overridden by a strong authoritarian drive in PLD the following way (see table 5):

- depersonalized and rational-legal authority is challenged by personal and charismatic (hence authoritarian) leadership, thus formally legal but substantially charismatic legitimacy prevails /C-1/;
- formally free elections turn into plebiscites (which include strong authoritarian elements) /C-2/;
- an extraordinary situation or crisis narrative boosts personalist and charismatic leadership, accompanied with more revolutionary, voluntarist (hence authoritarian) politics and policies and charismatic legitimacy /C-3; C-4/;
- charisma, and revolutionary (radical and/or unorthodox) politics and policies gain priority over rules, norms and customs, which undermines leaderless and liberal democracy /C-4/;
- political demagogy prevails over rational discussion, which gives wider room for the manipulation of citizens’ will, therefore undermines liberal democracy /C-5/;
- representation turns to be a top-down, plebiscitary (therefore authoritarian) relationship vis-à-vis the bottom-up and nature of parliamentary representation /C-6/;
- direct links between political leaders (chief executives) and citizens replace indirect ones and intermediary associations which dismantle the liberal filter between citizens and government43 /C-2 and C-6/.

From all of this it follows that populism weakens and/or undermines the liberal democratic version of rational-legal authority, if it develops further toward PLD (namely towards charismatic leadership, plebiscitary politics, crisis discourse, radical politics and policies, political demagogy, top-down and direct representation).. Charisma and other components of PLD undermine the liberal constraints of democratic rule like the rule of law (i.e. rational-legal authority) and weaken or dismantle the intermediaries which contributed to the taming

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43 E.g. the role of parliament is depreciated vis-à-vis the direct link between the leader and the electorate. Even Weber regarded parliament as a filter between public opinion and political leaders (cf. Senigaglia 2016), but since the last quarter of the 20th century the political science literature has acknowledged the decline of parliaments.
of arbitrary rule generated either by popular will or by the policy and politics of the government.

Secondly, I return to the question of the democratic vs. authoritarian nature of PLD. One of my conclusions is that in PLD, democracy and autocracy are not incompatible: on the contrary, it can be regarded as a fusion of democratic and authoritarian rule. We have seen that the legitimacy of PLD is democratic in form, but authoritarian in substance. Hence, PLD is an independent, sui generis authority type. The compatibility and coherent unity of democratic and autocratic elements is not an outcome of the pathological conjunction of things, but an endogenous feature of PLD. PLD comes into being not from a politician’s temporary or ‘transitionary’ deviance or from some derailing of political processes. On the contrary, Weber explained the emergence of PLD with the political logic of modern mass democracy. From all of this it follows that populism, if it develops toward PLD, strengthens both democratic and authoritarian rule. It is hard to overestimate the significance of the last two findings for democratic theory.

Appendix

Table 5. The theoretical (causal) conditions of PLD

| C-1. | The more the nature of authority is charismatic, the more the legal and democratic nature of rule becomes a mere form. |
| C-2. | The more charismatic domination prevails, the greater the extent (formally free) that elections turn into (substantially) a plebiscite or even an acclamation. |
| C-3. | The more the actual political situation is regarded as extraordinary, (a.) the easier it is to emerge as a charismatic leader; (b.) the stronger the role electoral success (recognition) gains as the basis of legitimacy; and (c.) the more revolutionary (therefore voluntarist) policy becomes legitimate. |
| C-4. | The more charismatic domination prevails, (a.) the more politics and policies gain a revolutionary and voluntarist (hence authoritarian) character; (b.) the stronger politics prevail ( politicization) over rules, norms and customs. |
| C-5. | The more demagogy plays an important role in leaders’ rhetoric and in political communication, (a.) the more democratic politics / political struggle is about personalities rather than about parties and/or policy-issues, (b.) to the larger extent the ‘will of the people’ can be shaped or manipulated by leaders; |
| C-6. | The stronger the representative role of (the incumbent) charismatic leader vis-à-vis the representative role of parliament or national assembly, the more representation turns to be a top-down, plebiscitary and therefore authoritarian relationship. |
Table 6. PLD and populist politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>authority type</th>
<th>PLD (conceptual / theoretical)</th>
<th>‘Plebiscitary’ conditions / politics (empirical)</th>
<th>examples of populist politicians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. nature of charisma</td>
<td>routinized/’manufactured’ charisma</td>
<td>personalisation of politics and the emergence of leadership (charisma): -personal mission, vision, politics of redemption; -leader vs party; -heroism -responsibility.</td>
<td>de Gaulle, Chavez, Le Pen, Berlusconi, Orbán, Trump, Erdogan, Putin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. legitimacy of rule</td>
<td>charismatic and legal-rational* (democratic legitimacy)</td>
<td>-democratic (electoral) legitimacy = mandate from the people (people’s will); +plebiscitary means like referendum, national consultations.</td>
<td>de Gaulle, Chavez, Berlusconi, Orbán, Trump</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. basis of legitimacy (role of recognition)</td>
<td>recognition ‘…is treated as the basis of legitimacy’</td>
<td>electoral success / popular mandate</td>
<td>de Gaulle, Chavez, Berlusconi, Orbán, Trump</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. expression of recognition</td>
<td>turn free election towards plebiscite (consent)</td>
<td>plebiscitary politics (referendums, direct link to the people)</td>
<td>de Gaulle, Chavez, Berlusconi, Orbán, Trump</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. situation</td>
<td>crisis or crisis discourse</td>
<td>-crisis discourse (threat, enemy, need for radical change)…</td>
<td>de Gaulle, Chavez, Orbán, Trump, Erdogan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. stake of politics</td>
<td>high (revolutionary politics and policies)</td>
<td>high (radical or revolutionary politics and policies)</td>
<td>de Gaulle, Chavez, Orbán, Trump, Erdogan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. policy / politics</td>
<td>radicalism (combination of normal and/or unusual)</td>
<td>-unorthodox policies; -efficiency over rule of law and predictability;</td>
<td>de Gaulle, Chavez, Orbán, Trump, Erdogan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. means of convincing followers</td>
<td>demagogy</td>
<td>populist rhetoric (polarizing, divisive, radical emotional)</td>
<td>Chavez, Berlusconi, Orbán, Trump, Erdogan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. representation</td>
<td>top-down representation prevails over bottom-up** or descriptive one</td>
<td>-shift of representative role from parliament to chief executive; -symbolic representation / representation of the people’s will;</td>
<td>de Gaulle, Chavez, Orbán, Trump, Erdogan, Putin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* charismatic authority hides behind formally democratic legitimacy.
** shift of representative role from parliament to chief executive
References


