

Role of Social Media in Modern Populism

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Abstract: Freedom of expression strengthens democracy, but on many occasions, in history freedom of expression, was used to crush the same democracy and populism and authoritarianism were born. In 21st century the role of social media in relation to freedom of expression is posing a serious threat to functional democracy in various countries. Populist leaders are using social media to spread false and misleading news in the context of politics under the guise of freedom of expression has given rise to populism and totalitarianism in many countries of the world. In this research paper, we have analysed the relationship between populism and social media with particular reference to the rise of populist leaders, Nazis from the Weimar Republic and AfD party in Germany, Victor Orban in Hungary, Erdogan in Turkey, Narendra Modi in India, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Jean Marie La Pen in France, Nigel Farage in Britain and Donald Trump in the United States of America.

Keywords: Authoritarianism, Social Media, Populism, Misinformation, Democracy

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, populism is emerging as a major threat to democracy in countries around the world, for which social media is creating a fertile ground. Populism as an ideology is attacking democratic institutions and completely rejecting democratic values. The word Populism is derived from the Latin word “populus” which in English means people, and in the German language it is seen in the context of “Volk” (Wodak 2015, 30).

Populism is a new species of fascism but more moderate than fascism. According to Argentine historian Professor Federico Finkelstein. (2017,13) “Modern populism was born out of fascism and both fascism and populism are genealogically connected, belong to the same history”. After defeat in 1945 fascism reshaped itself in new forms known as populism. “Populism is an authoritarian form of democracy where political opponents are perceived as enemies” (Finkelstein 2017, 20). Populists are those people who consider themselves to be the self-proclaimed representative of the common people/local people, and consider their every word/thought as the thought and wish of the people. Populist leaders, in a dramatic, performative manner, usually make baseless, emotionally charged statements in favour of the local common people and completely reject the existing system and politics. They oppose immigrants and minorities in the name of language and religion, consider them a threat to their country and consider themselves the protectors of the country. Populist not only divided the masses on social front but also on economic front, populist economic policy destroyed the middle class of the society.

Populism as an ideology cannot be limited to any single definition, yet some scholars have tried to define Populism. Most political scientists see populism as Right or For Right populism and Left-wing populism. According to Ruth Wodak (2015, 30), right-wing populism is a political ideology that rejects the existing “political consensus” and combines laissez-faire liberalism and anti-elitism. Bulgarian political scientist Ivan Krastev believes that this is the era of populism, Today we are living in populism (Muller 2016, 2). Dutch social scientist Cas Mudde defines populism as “the non-liberal democratic response to non-democratic liberals” (ibid, 8). Some scholars believe that Populism does not respect any established political-social system and rejects everything. As Benjamin Arditi says



about the relationship between democracy and Populism, Populism is a person invited as a guest at a dinner party who is drunk, who does not respect the manners of behaviour of sitting at the dinner table, who behaves rudely with other guests, wives, women (Ibid, 8). According to Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012), populism divides the society into two homogeneous opposing groups such as pure people vs corrupt elite, friend vs enemy, us and them etc. (Wodak 2015, 30). Generally, polarization of public opinion is the biggest political weapon of populist leaders for which they use social media.

There have been many instances in history where authoritarianism has emerged from within democracy across the world. Hungarian sociologist Karoly Mannheim (1943) in his work “Diagnosis of Our Time: Wartime Essays of a Sociologist”, even said that “dictatorship can arise only in democracy” (Furedi (2018, 169). Freedom of expression is the basic foundation of democracy. In democracy, citizens are granted the right to freedom of expression. This right act as check on those holding power within democratic system and it is precisely this right that constitute the greatest virtue and strength of democracy. if any one person is protesting in a democratic system, it means that he is warning about the coming danger, freedom of expression and opposition play an important role in maintaining control and balance which ultimately keeps democracy safe. But this is one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is that the very freedom of expression which strengthens democracy can prove dangerous to that same democracy if left unchecked or unregulated. In fact, information is the oxygen of democracy, if oxygen itself gets polluted, it will kill the democracy. Real and factual information through press and media creates a healthy public opinion, but if public opinion is contaminated through polluted information, then it is impossible for democracy to survive. Social media is the biggest source of misleading and false information.

There have been many occasions in history when under the guise of the rights of freedom of expression present in a democracy, cunning people or groups of people have managed to mislead the common people and pollute public opinion through false, fabricated and misleading news in order to capture power. The Nazis of Germany and the Fascists of Italy were successful in misleading the common people under the guise of freedom of expression, they used newspapers and radio. but today, in the 21st century, social media is playing an important role in the objective dissemination of false and misleading information. For example, social media played an important role in Donald Trump winning the presidential election in 2016. Populist leaders like Hungary's Victor Orban, AfD in Germany, Turkey's Erdogan, Philippines' Rodrigues Duterte, Marie Le Pen in France, Nigel Farage in Britain are examples of this. All of them spread misleading and false news about their opponents through social media to gain power or get re-elected and were successful in swaying public opinion in their favour.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE POPULARITY OF AfD IN GERMANY

Experts in political science believe that the Nazis were born from the womb of the Weimar Republic as Alternative für Deutschland (AD) emerged from 21st century German democracy. If there was no open freedom of expression in The Weimar Republic, perhaps the Nazis would not have been born. According to William L. Shirer (1989, 91) Weimar constitution was ratified by assembly on 31 July 1919 and The Weimer republic was born, Weimar constitution was the most democratic constitution of 20th century. “All Germans are equal before the law, Personal liberty is inviolable, Every German has a right to express his opinion freely, All Germans have the right to form associations or societies, inhabitants of the Reich enjoy complete liberty of belief and conscience, no man in the world would be freer than a German, no government more democratic and liberal than Weimer republic (ibid 91). Hitler used the above liberty provided by the Weimar constitution to mobilise the masses and he got the support of conservative army also. But according to historian, newspaper were his main allies controlled by German conservative elites. The fear in the minds of newspaper owners in America and especially Britain towards the Bolsheviks who came to power in 1917 created Hitler as a dictator who could stop the Bolsheviks. According to professor Kathryn S. Olmsted. (2022,12) Owners of six newspapers of Britain and USA, William Randolph Hearst, Lord Max Beaverbrook, Robert McCormick, and Joseph dismissed the fascist threat, even Owner of the London “*Daily mail*” lord Harold Rothermere justified each and every act of German Nazi leader Adolf Hitter in 1934. In his news article Rothermere claimed that Benito Mussolini’s Italy and Hitler’s Germany as the “best-governed nations in Europe today.” (Olmsted 2022,14). Using freedom of expression as a shield, the Nazis attacked the Treaty of Versailles and the leadership of

the Weimar Republic in their speeches, defamed the Weimar Republic through false and unfounded news and succeeded in misleading the people. Historians believe that if the government of the Weimar Republic had banned Hitler's crazy demonstrations and speeches in the beginning, the Nazis might not have come to power. Hitler and his allies blamed the Weimar Republic for Germany's economic troubles. Whereas the Treaty of Versailles was imposed on defeated Germany and the leaders of the Weimar Republic were not responsible for the defeat. In fact, the government of the Weimar Republic had done excellent work on the economic front and gave freedom of expression to the common people. The government of the Weimar Republic respected democracy, did not impose any restrictions on freedom of expression, which Hitler and his associates took advantage of and killed the very democracy that gave them the opportunity to move forward. Presently there is an era of social media where there is no gatekeeper in terms of information. There is no editor on social media to check the authenticity of the news. False news spreads faster than true news. Hitler and his nazi associates convinced the general public that by occupying Eastern Europe and Russia, securing oil from the Caucasus and wheat from Ukraine, they could permanently resolve the nation's industrial and food related problems. These populist promises were attracting people. But after the defeat of Germany in the Second World War and the end of Hitler and the terrible destruction, German society learned a lesson and did not give place to the extremist right wing for a long time. But the rise of social media has changed the German politics to a great extent. The popularity of the far-right, nationalist party, called AFD, is increasing rapidly. Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) is basically an anti -Euro, anti-immigration and anti-refugee right wing populist party (Serrano 2019,214). There are some similarities between the rise of the Nazis in the Weimar Republic and the rise of the AfD party in Germany in the 21st century. The leaders of this party praised Nazi leaders, including Hitler. AfD party always opposed the immigrants, refugees and the Muslims. The AfD has its own strong mechanism for combating false and disinformation on social media. Institute, run by Nina Rosenwald, an American business executive, systematically helps the AfD in fabricating and spreading false and misleading news, this institute spread false news that non-Europeans are raping German women, Christianity will end and immigrants from foreign countries are spreading infectious diseases in Germany (Hannah, 2024, 46). The widespread support of this party can be gauged from the fact that after 2023 it has become the second-largest party in Germany (ibid 46).

According to Yascha Mounk (2019,170), a professor of German origin at Johns Hopkins University, in the 2017 elections, AfD got huge success in German provinces like Saxony, where the number of people of foreign origin was less than 4%. They defeated all the parties there. The main reason for this is that where the number of foreign origin or refugees is lower, during polarization, the local natives who are in the majority mobilize against the people of foreign origin and vote for the Populists. If there is no polarization, then the populists do not get much benefit. The AfD has used social media very effectively for political activities. Alzheimer analysed the Facebook posts from 2013 and 2014 and found that the AfD used more populist rhetoric on Facebook than it did on other communication channels, whereas Sébastien Schneider examined the Facebook posts of six political parties of Germany in 2014 and 2015 and found that social media was a major factor in the success of the AfD (Serrano 2019,215). AfD was the most active party on Facebook, Instagram and tweeter and posted the highest number of message on these platforms between 2015 and 2018 (Serrano 2019,219).

3. POPULISM, SOCIAL MEDIA AND VIKTOR ORBÁN IN HUNGARY

Social media played a key role in the rise of Hungarian populist leader Viktor Orbán as a populist leader in the 2010s. Viktor Orbán held the socialist government of 1990 to 2010 responsible for all the troubles of Hungary. Orbán made the corruption of the socialist government, the economic crisis of 2008 and the failure of the government's welfare policies an issue (Skytt 2019 87). During the election campaigns, Orbán distorted the history of Hungary to the public, saying that Hungary has been treated unfairly in history. He attacked both Soviet Russia and the European Union, calling them internationalists and saying that both of them had taken over Hungary (ibid. 87). After coming to power in 2010, Prime Minister Viktor Urban's party passed a fundamental law in Parliament in 2012 through a constitutional amendment, through which the powers of the Constitutional Court, established in 1989, were reduced (Furedi 2018, 174). For this, his party created favourable public opinion on social media. Under the new law, no foreign person can settle in Hungary. He won the elections of 2010, 2014, 2018 and 2022 consecutively, and remained

in power till early 2026, during which he controlled the media and the judiciary. During this period, they had completely taken control of the educational institutions. “By 2024, there were 5,000 schools in Hungary in which political figures associated with Orban's party Fidesz were appointed as teachers and principals” (Ibid 88). Orbán managed to divide the whole of Hungary into ‘us’: patriots, nationalists and moderate freedom fighters and ‘the others’: internationalists, EU “supporters and foreign mercenaries during communism (ibid) and achieved success in elections four times in a row from 2010 to 2022. Orbán lost the 2026 election to Peter Magyar. Orbán openly said that refugees, especially Muslims, are a threat to Hungary's security and Orbán started his political journey by politicizing Hungary's culture and traditions on social media. According to him, the country's traditions and culture cannot be questioned, especially on Facebook. He tries to create the identity of a strong man by posting pictures of himself driving a tractor, meeting an old woman, with the anti-terrorist squad and in a helicopter with the military forces (Farkas & Bene 2025,39-65).

Orban is seen acting politically on social media, which his supporters consider to be real. During his rule, Orban kept television and print media completely under government control, interfered in the judiciary, and besides this, he controlled almost all the democratic institutions. Polarization of public opinion played an important role in Organ's political rise. Orban managed to divide the common Hungarians into two camps on all issues ranging from economic problems to refugees, citizenship, foreign policy, on the basis of which he continued winning elections from 2010 to 2022, but ultimately lost the 2026 elections to Peter Magyar.

4. POPULISM, SOCIAL MEDIA AND EMERGENCE OF RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN IN TURKEY

Erdoğan's party, the AKP, first came to power in 2002. During its initial term, it maintained good relations with the established elite class and performed well on the economic front. But after winning the election for the second time, Erdoğan focused on two issues: first, he started attacking Turkey's established traditional media like newspapers and television channels, and second, they created their own supporting media. From 2007 to 2011, Erdoğan and his party forced some large media owners to hand over their media houses to Erdoğan's supporters and close associates. They used censorship and penalties as tactics to acquire those media who were critical of the Erdoğan govt. In 2009, a Turkish media group known as Dogan Media Group was forced to sell its two newspapers, Milliyet and Vatan, to the Erdoğan supporter Demiroren Group. (Sahin 2021). After 2010, Erdoğan and his party AKP very effectively used social media platforms to polarize every stratum of society for electoral benefits. Erdoğan and the AKP managed to control social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to propagate their promises, views on different issues and mobilize their supporters. Erdoğan's government enacted a law called "Law No. 5651" to control the Internet and social media with the aim of suppressing the voices of its opponents. In 2015, it also imposed temporary restrictions on large social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube for not following government rules (Cay 2019, 96). In his early days in politics, Erdoğan was criticized by poets, artists, academics, intellectuals. That's why, after consolidating his power in politics, he continuously attacked intellectuals, especially university professors, teachers and journalists. During the violent conflict between got forces and Turkish Kurds, a peace petition was signed by various intellectuals, academics and university professors demanded peace to end the conflict. Erdogan responded very aggressively to the “petition for peace”. In his speech, President Erdoğan attacked 1,128 academics and researchers from eighty-nine Turkish universities and 355 academics and researchers from other countries who had signed the peace petition on behalf of Academics for Peace. (Sertdemir 2024, 5). In connection with the 2016 attempted military coup, many Turkish scholars—particularly professors, journalists, and academics—had their citizenship revoked and passports canceled based merely on suspicion and arbitrary, baseless allegations; they were either imprisoned or became refugees within their own country. Erdoğan got used citizenship termination as a tool to suppress the dissenters.

During the Hitler era, after 1932, many professors, scientists, and other intellectuals were dismissed from German universities because Hitler and the Nazis perceived them as an ideological enemy. Now, in the 21st century, the Erdoğan's government of Turkey, which has been continuously in power since 2002, is the only government that

has arrested, imprisoned, and revoked the citizenship of the highest number of professors, intellectuals, and journalists, or forced them to leave the country. According to Seçkin Sertdemir Ozdemir (2024,6-8), Assistant Professor Era Dungan, Associate Professor Kıvanç Ersoy, Assistant Professor Muzaffer Kaya, and Assistant Professor Meral Camcı, were arrested who had read the “peace petition”(some groups of intellectual opposed violence and killing of Kurdish population and moved the peace petition to end the conflict) to the press on 12 January 2016, were arrested On 16 March 2016 they were, charges with ‘spreading propaganda for a terrorist organisation but in final court proceeding Turkey’s Constitutional Court ruled that Academics for “Peace petition” signatories had not committed any crime regarding propaganda for a terrorist organization. According to the renowned Turkish writer and scholar Eye Temelkuran (2024, 45), Erdoğan has on several occasions rejected historical facts and logic, once claiming to South American Muslim scholars and journalists that a Muslim scholar had arrived in South America in 1178, 314 years before Christopher Columbus arrived in South America in 1492, Because Columbus himself acknowledged the existence of mosques on hills top off the coast of Cuba, Erdoğan's false story gained international attention, Criticized and ridiculed by the Western media. In July 2016, Erdoğan's government in Turkey faced an attempted military coup, but Erdoğan and his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) succeeded in suppressing it. Following this, the government revoked the citizenship of approximately 152000 people and issued arrest warrants against them, many of those arrested were university and college professors, teachers, military officials, judges, journalists, writers and media workers (Sertdemir 2024,1). According to Eye Temelkuran (2024: 94-95), Erdoğan has cultivated a base of supporters among the poor whose livelihoods depend on his political survival, his party (AKP) provides these impoverished Turkish citizens with bread and coal for heating. Addressing a 'Mukhtar' conference—a political gathering attended by many his supporters and scholars, in March 2016, Erdoğan stated that his opponents want him to leave. He added that if he were to leave, Turkey would be ruined (Temelkuran, 2024, 96). Intellectuals in Turkey believe that if anyone who is against Erdoğan is said to be against the nation, because Erdoğan is the Nation, if you oppose Erdogan and his “Justice and Development Party” (AKP), you may lose your citizenship and passport also, and you may become a refugee in your own country.

Erdoğan and his ruling party, AKP (Justice and Development Party), intertwined religion and state to justify each and every government policy and activity, and for that purpose, the government, the AKP (Justice and Development Party) itself, and their own social media influencers are using social media platforms to justify government policies and activities. According to Burhan Snmez, when Erdoğan was the mayor of Istanbul, he was reciting a poem in a rally.

“The mosques are our barracks
The domes our helmets
The minarets our bayonets
And the believers our soldiers”

Originally written by Turkish nationalist Zika Gokalp a century before and for reciting that poem, Erdoğan was sentenced to 10-month prison by then-secular judiciary (Prasad 2018,40). This indicates that Erdoğan believes that religious principles are above the parliamentary law and this was the main reason he intervened in the judiciary. He openly talks about religious supremacy at public meetings and rallies. According to Kènes & Yilmaz (2024, 3), there are 57.5 million social media users, or nearly 70 percent of the total population of Turkey are using social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, by January 2024. Intervention and impact of religion on state created the opinion to justify the online censorship, Individual users are discouraged from expressing critical views on government and critical views could be perceived as contradictory to religious principles (Kenes & Yilmaz 2024, 4). Recap Tayyip Erdoğan has 12 million 982 thousand followers on social media and he emphasized that social media should be used effectively instead of old-style political propaganda activities in the local elections to be held on March 31, 2019((Dasli 2019 248-49). According to the Wall Street Journal, on September 16, 2013, AKP party officials were recruiting ‘6,000’ people for a ‘social media army and the AKP Trolling army protects the AKP from accusations of direct involvement in trolling

and the majority of the powerful trolls are unknown to common, but they are party members or associates, their real identities are known (Eran Sacha 2018,6-8). AKP Trolls rely heavily on bots, the highest number of bots used by the AKP Troll army in the world (ibid 11). Erdogan and AKP Like his Hungarian counterpart, Viktor Orban's Fidesz, the AKP systematically directed hate speech towards homosexuals and transgender people to flare popular resentment (Orkut 2023,16–19).

5. THE RISE OF POPULISM AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN FRANCE AND BRITAIN

In France, Marie Le Pen, the populist leader of the National Front, lost the 2017 presidential election runoff, despite receiving an unusually high 33.9% of the vote. Marine Le Pen described herself as the true representative of the native French people and described her opponent, Emmanuel Macron, as an outsider, a man from Brussels and a man from the IMF World Bank (Traverso 2019, 38–39). Political scholars do not consider Marine Le Pen a fascist, but they also do not consider her a democratic liberal. She finds herself standing between the two streams. Her right-wing supporters believe that this is her main weakness. Apart from this, she did not use the aggressive language of the fascists. This caused her harm. She failed to take the political polarization one level further, but she has emerged as a political force in France. Marine Le Pen's National Front is the only party in France which has an official internet website on which it presents its slogans and policies to the people (Khouardy2021).

Marie Le Pen's National Front aggressively promotes its political views on anti-immigrant policies, terrorism, and economic issues on social media. The National Front always highlights the fear and insecurity of foreign immigrants and terrorism in its election campaigns, which proves to be very effective from the voting point of view on social media, because security is always the first priority for ordinary people. They address their election campaigns to ordinary people by calling them Us and Them. Here Us means their party and supporters. These people call their party and supporters “we the people, defender of the nation” and talk about fighting their opponents like others (ibid). A special thing about French Populism that differentiates it from Populism in other countries is that its leader, Marine Le Pen, rejects both left and right ideologies and attacks both equally. She has presented a new classification of French politics as Globalizers (Mondialistes) and Nationalists (Nationaux), so that she can get both progressive and conservative votes (Corral, et al. 2023, 1-12). Marie Le Pen and her party mainly used Twitter as a social media platform in the elections to communicate with voters and managed to create 100% polarization on the issue of foreign immigrants, which benefited them (ibid). Marine Le Pen and her supporters spread a large amount of false and misleading information against her rival Emmanuel Macron through social media, due to which Emmanuel Macron was forced to file a defamation case against Marine Le Pen (Hannan 2024, 46).

Right-wing populists played an important role in Brexit, i.e. Britain's exit from the European Union. In Britain, Boris Johnson made his mark as a populist leader, but after leaving UKIP and forming his own Brexit Party, Nigel Farage made Brexit an issue. He called Brexit day Independence Day. He said that it was a historic day, He thanked the leave camp, i.e. those who supported Britain's separation from the European Union, i.e. Brexit. In the words of Nigel Farage, Brexit is basically the victory of real people, ordinary people, decent people over the European Union (Bourmeche, 2023, 144). A section of Britain felt that staying in the European Union was harming Britain's economy and adversely affecting employment. Ideological diversity in Britain is not a new thing, but in 2016, the way polarization was seen among the common British people on the issue of whether Britain should remain in the European Union or should come out was surprising. On social media, ordinary British people appeared as followers or followers of two streams instead of voters, where they were not ready to listen to the views of the other at all. They try their best to convert citizens into followers or staunch supporters through various means. For this, they give factual, emotional interpretations of economic and historical events and try to erase the line between religion and politics. Nigel Farage and his team claimed on social media that “they are fighting against the big lies and corruption of multinational companies, big commercial banks” (Bourmeche 2023,145). Nigel Farage has been found on many occasions telling white lies which his supporters spread widely on Facebook, such as that 75% of the laws of Britain are decided by the European Union and, due to the European Union, Britain loses 350 million euros every week. Which was a completely false claim (Hannan, 2024:46). This lie had an impact on the vote for Brexit. Supporters of Brexit, the leave camp and especially populist leaders, strongly promoted the idea that Brexit would save millions of pounds which could be spent

on the National Health Service (NHS). Apart from this, they presented false figures related to Britain's contribution to the budget of the European Union, through which people were misled (Bourmeche, 2023, 145). Nigel Farage has always opposed immigration, with border security and sovereignty being the biggest issues for him during Brexit. He claims that all British people hate all the institutions of the European Union, including the European Commission and the European Court. Nigel Farage himself believes that populism is very good, it has many benefits. British sovereignty was acquired through EU laws, we have to take our sovereignty back. The EU's Common Fisheries Policy harms us (ibid 152). Nigel Farage managed to spread misleading, fact-free news about the benefits of Brexit, the EU, and migrants through social media. British populists always attacked migrants from eastern Europe, especially police, who are the largest foreign-born group in the UK. During the Brexit referendum, the populists polarized the British society (Nowicka 2018, 1). The British populist identified two biggest enemies first was “Brussels” (represented as EU, German chancellor Angela Merkel and EU bureaucrats) and second were “Migrant” including poles as plumbers, Romanian as fruit pickers and Muslims as terrorist (Ege & Springer.2023 57)

6. RISE OF NARENDRA MODI IN INDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

In 2014, the national political party, the Indian national congress, was in power and lost the election. At that time, political scientists were not surprised because the UPA got, led by the largest and oldest political party, the Indian national congress, and their allies were surrounded by various scams like coal scam, the 2G spectrum scam, a common wealth game scam. At that time, these scams were allegations. Before the 2014 election, these scams were just allegations. A court case hearing was in progress. Just before the 2014 election, Narendra Modi, the chief minister, Frome Gujrat, managed to become a national campaigner for his party, BJP. In 2019 NarendraModi, with 50 million on Twitter and 45 million followerson Facebook, used social media as his main communication platform and is nowlisted among the most followed leaders in the world (Sharma 2022,5). Earlier During the 2014 election, Narendra Modi fiercely attacked the leaders of the UPA like congress president Sonia Gandhi, then congress president and prime economist Manmohan Singh. According to Vijay Prasad (2018,23), the victory of Narendra Modi was based on a PR campaign and a successful social media campaign against Ruling party Indian National Congress, and convinced people that he is pro-development and pro-good governance. He also convinced the business elite that he was their close friend. According to Sharma (2022,5) Modi’s success in 2014 was based on social media platforms that not only helped Modi to communicate directly with the voters but he also used social media to attack the traditional Indian news media.

According to media reports, the manner in which Narendra Modi launched a personal attack on leaders of the ruling got over the corruption was unprecedented in history. Long before the election, television channels owned by big corporations took advantage of freedom of speech to amplify and spread the baseless information and stories about corruption in the UPA led by Manmohan Singh. The UPA govt, led by the Indian National Congress Party and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, provided the space for freedom of speech for their opponent, BJP leaders, and television channels. With the assistance of the RSS, a social organization, a parent organization of the BJP and its affiliated organizations, a movement named 'India Against Corruption' was launched under the leadership of Anna Hazarea Gandhian leader from Maharashtra—involving numerous well-known social activists, retired bureaucrats, teachers, journalists, and judges. Ramon Magsaysay Award winner Arvind Kejriwal, retired police officer Kiran Bedi, Justice Santosh Hegde, prominent lawyers Shanti Bhushan and Prashant Bhushan, and Baba Ramdev, Professor Yogendra Yadav, Professor Kumar Vishwas were among the key faces of the movement. The movement received extensive coverage on television news channels and newspapers and social media. This movement created a political atmosphere that turned public opinion against the ruling party. Allegations of scams which were still under judicial scrutiny and investigation and had not yet been proven, were aggressively propagated across social media, newspapers, and television channels as if they were established facts. These allegations largely consisted of fabricated stories and baseless assumptions; subsequently, most of the charges, including those levelled by the then-CAG, were proven false in court, and the majority of the accused were acquitted. Later, the government appointed Vinod Rai to a significant position, while Kiran Bedi—a prominent face of the movement—was made the Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry. Many political analysts believe that this movement was orchestrated in a theatrical, planned manner to build public

sentiment against the ruling party. Even before the 2014 election Narendra Modi and his team overcame the dependency on mainstream print and television media by relying on social media, Narendra Modi used every available social media network in 2009 and removed the media constraint between himself and the public, while no other political leader realized it (Zain2019, 200). before the 2014 election Narendra Modi and his party “Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP)” engaged a team of well-trained IT professionals to execute their election campaign (ibid 200).

7. SOCIAL MEDIA, POPULISM AND RODRIGO DUTERTE IN PHILIPPINES

According to Philippine novelist and journalist Ninotchka Rosca, in the 2016 Philippine presidential elections, the victory of Rodrigo Duterte was based on a “perfect social media campaign” in a country where fifty-eight percent of the population was active on social media (Prasad 2018). During the presidential campaign in 2016, Duterte drew a comparison between himself and Adolf Hitler, stating, “I hate drugs. Drug addicts and drug lords are the biggest problem in the country and I will solve it.” Following Duterte's victory in June 2016, approximately 3,900 individuals were killed within a few months, labelled as drug addicts or drug lords. The majority of these deceased individuals hailed from the poorest areas of the cities (Vijay Prasad 2018,60-63).

The election of Rodrigo Duterte as President of the Philippines in 2016 presented the role of digital media in politics as a threat to democracy. Duterte has been called an authoritarian populist. Before Duterte, the history of the Philippines had fluctuated between authoritarianism and liberal democracy. Before being elected President, Rodrigo Duterte was the mayor of Davao City and had an image of a strong man. Despite corruption, human rights violations and many other allegations, he was elected President with 39.01% of the votes, (Malayalam & Tierra 2023,4) Some scholars believe that people were confident that Duterte would establish peace and order and end the atmosphere of fear. Some believe that they chose Duterte for a better future. But the most influential factor that gained him popularity was Duterte's portrayal of himself on social media as the spokesperson and protector of the common people. After winning the 2016 elections, Duterte understood the electoral power of false and misleading information spread on social media. Hence, in the subsequent elections, he used social media and technology expert companies to influence the voters in the elections. In 2019, data expert Christopher Wylie revealed that Cambridge Analytica was tested in the Philippines before being used in Western countries to influence voters in elections through data obtained from social media (ibid,9).

8. THE RISE OF DONALD TRUMP AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Donald Trump used social media, especially Twitter, most effectively in his 2016 election campaign. American public opinion had never been so polarized. Trump made baseless and false allegations against his opponent Hillary Clinton and spread false and misleading news about her on social media. Donald Trump and his allies were accused of using a British company called Cambridge Analytica to influence voters in his election campaign, which targeted potential Trump voters through personal information obtained from social media, which was revealed by a data expert named Christopher Wylie in an interview in 2019 (ibid 9). Donald Trump made baseless claims in his election campaign which were creating insecurity among the people. Like he said that Mexico sends criminals and rapists to America. If I come to power, I will build a wall on the Mexican border. Trump said that he will deport Latin Americans and Muslims from the country and send them back to their countries, end the free trade agreement with Mexico, and impose customs duties on China and Europe (Traverso 2019, 26-27). No one had predicted that Trump's claims would influence people so much that he would win the election. Most political scholars had assumed that Hillary Clinton would win the election, but Trump surprised everyone. The main reason for that was social media-based polarization and false information, which people accepted as truth.

According to David Runciman (2018,12), Professor of politics and international studies at Cambridge, On 17 Jan 2017, Donald Trump, in his inaugural address, cast doubt on the basic idea of representative government itself and it was a populist speech. After winning the presidency, Donald Trump realized the unimaginable power of social media. He summoned the heads of dominant Silicon Valley firms (Google, Apple, Amazon and others) to meet him at Trump Tower and most of them were present there other than Mark Zuckerberg. But Facebook CEO Sheryl Sandberg was present there (Runciman 2018,137). It was a clear indication that Trump wants to control the media.

Donald Trump, during his election campaign, used Twitter very effectively to attack his opponent. Some intellectuals called him Twitter precedent, like Barak Obama levelled as Facebook president, because Barak Obama used Facebook very effectively to win the presidential election. Due to Twitter, Donald Trump did not need traditional media, he could tweet messages directly to his millions of followers and Trump's Twitter feed gave him a powerful weapon (Mounk 2019,144). The impact of falls and misleading information spread on social media and other news websites was unprecedented. In the 2016 American presidential election, common people perceived falls and misleading information as true information. According to professor Yascha Mounk (2019,145), in August 2016, 42% of registered voters had come to believe that Hillary Clinton was “Evil” and when Donald Trump called Hillary Clinton the “devil.” In North Carolina, in North Carolina, 41% of Trump supporters believed that this was true.

9. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION:

The emergence of AfD party in Germany was based on polarization of public opinion by social media on anti-euro, anti-immigration and anti-refugee sentiments in German voters. AfD used the social media to propagate their anti-euro, anti-immigration and anti-refugee opinion in German voters, The liberal policies of Angela Merkel on immigration and refugee were largely responsible for the rise of the AfD in Germany as Nazis raised in the Weimar Republic against the Treaty of Versailles signed by The Weimar Republic. Nazis got the supports from various famous newspaper like London's “*Daily mail*” of Britain, America and Germany.

Victor Orbán, in Hungary, used social media to project himself as the sole protector of Hungary. He attacked the journalists and social workers and democratic institutions. He created fake enemies ‘like Muslim and other migrants, European institutions like the European central bank and the European commission, he similarly misinterpreted Hungarian history because history of Hungary itself is an emotional subject, because in both world war Hungary found itself on losing side and lost its territory. He polarizes the Hungarians on historical belief with help of social as well as traditional media. Orbán is known as Donald Trump of Hungary. It was the social media that were utilized by Orbán to spread the emotional stories as fact to convince his supporters. Erdogan and his party AKP in Turkey used social media to mobilise his supporters against the attempted military coup, his party AKP also recruited social media troll army to suppress their opponents he projected himself as nation of turkey on social media. Narendra Modi in India used well-trained IT professionals and social media experts in his 2014 election campaign to attack on ruling party. He used the social media to communicate his voters and spreads his promises packed in slogans, he used social media to portray his image as pro -poor, and promised to eradicate the corruption and black money.

Duterte, in the Philippines, presented himself as the protector of the Philippines against drug lords and drug addicts, and it was the social media campaign which justified the killing of poor Philippine citizens. Duterte used Cambridge Analytica firm and social media to win the election.

Donald Trump in America, used the tweeter very effectively to attract the masses. Some scalars labelled him as “tweeter president. Various times during the election, he promised impossible things with very precise calculations to attract specific classes of voters. For example, he announced that he would make a wall on the Mexico border to attract construction workers who were traditional Democratic voters. He attacked traditional media and called them fake; it was very much a calculated strategy to discredit the very credible newspapers like the Washington Post and others, because traditional newspapers can check them. Marie Le Pen in France, Nigel Farage in Britain, the AfD party in Germany and Rodrigues Duterte in the Philippines have some similar things in politics that social media played an important role in the rise of these populist leaders. All of them spread false and misleading news on social media, were hostile towards foreign citizens, refugees (except Duterte). Adopted a stance and considered them a threat, Orban controlled the media, everyone politicized history. Polarization of public opinion in the form of us and them was their main objective. These people presented themselves as patriots, protectors of the people, gained public support by linking politics with religion to emotional issues and used social media efficiently in their campaign. Aggressive speech on social media spreads faster than other news, which Donald Trump, Orbán, Narendra Modi and Duterte took advantage of that. while Marie La Pen and Nigel Farage weaponized misinformation to their advantage against their opponents. Populists appeared to be with oil lamps but in reality, they are with the wind. In this paper after analysing

the populist politics of AFD party in Germany, Orbán in Hungary , Erdogan in Turkey , Narendra Modi in India, Marie La Pen in France, Nigel Farage in Britain, Rodrigo Duterte in Philippines, and Donald Trump in United State of America , we come to conclusion that first all populist leaders tried to polarise the public opinion on emotional and economic issues, for that purpose they spread falls , misleading information and “manufactured stories without fact” on social media and use various internet news website to divide the population in two opposite camp. After coming to power, they used to attack on intellectuals’ academics and journalist to discredit them, then populist tried to complete control over media, bureaucracy, universities and judiciary also as Erdogan have done in turkey on large scale, Donald Trump also attacked the intellectuals and journalist on social media. They always in search of manufactured enemies to attack on them and consolidate their voters and divert the attention of common people from real issue like inequality and unemployment. They don’t believe in democratic institution. they used social media a very sophisticated powerful weapon to the attack and discredit their opponents and democratic institution.

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