

Chapter

Populism Typology across Europe, the United States, and Japan: Still the Century of Hybrid Fascism?

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Abstract

This chapter offers a comparative analysis of contemporary populism across Europe, the United States, and Japan, highlighting the interaction between outsider mobilization and insider-driven authoritarian tendencies as the core dynamic of the global populist turn. Moreover, it examines whether the interaction of ideological echoes and insider-outsider hybridization warrants reconsidering fascism not as a historical recurrence but as a transformed, hybrid analytical category in contemporary democratic politics. In Europe, immigration and refugee pressures enabled the rapid expansion of right-wing outsider populist parties, normalizing welfare chauvinism and civilizational Christian identity politics. In the United States, outsider populism penetrated the Republican Party, where evangelical networks and Catholic post-liberalism reshaped the party from within, producing an insider-outsider hybrid that facilitated democratic erosion under the Trump administrations. Japan, long considered a deviant case, experienced a nationwide surge of outsider populism in 2024–2025, while Shinto-inflected cultural nationalism continued to sustain elite-driven insider populism. The result is a vertically fused hybrid configuration reminiscent of prewar “fascism from above” interacting with bottom-up extremism. Across the three regions, religion or quasi-religion operates as a symbolic and organizational reservoir for political mobilization, though taking distinct institutional forms. By synthesizing Mizushima’s outsider-politics theory, Maruyama’s classical typology of “fascism from above/below,” and emerging theories of hybrid authoritarianism, the chapter identifies shared mechanisms of democratic backsliding and offers a new typology of populist politics and hybrid authoritarian formations in advanced democracies.

Keywords: populism, outsider mobilization, insider authoritarianism, democratic erosion, hybrid political forms, role of religion

1. Introduction

Contemporary politics has entered what many scholars describe as a *global populist turn* [1, 2]. Across advanced democracies, political systems have been reshaped by converging forces: anti-establishment sentiment, identity-based polarization, the rise of outsider candidates, and widespread distrust of traditional institutions [3].

Following Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's widely cited definition of populism as a *thin-centered ideology* contrasting a "pure people" with a "corrupt elite," this chapter adopts Jiro Mizushima's definition of populism as "a radical political movement that understands established politics as the monopoly of a corrupt elite, sets against this the pure will of the people, positions itself as the representative of that will, and criticizes established politics and established parties" [1, 4].

This definition highlights populism not only as anti-elitism or xenophobia but also as a political mobilization rooted in cultural backlash against changing value systems [2]. Populist movements campaign against established parties, immigration, Islamization, globalization, and free-trade regimes; cultivate support from groups who feel excluded from politics; and criticize vested interests in the name of "the people" [5].

In Europe, the immigration and refugee issue accelerated the rise of radical right populist parties from the 2010s, enabling some to enter government (Italy) or threaten centrist dominance (France, the United Kingdom) [6]. In the Americas, populist-oriented presidents were elected—Trump in the United States, López Obrador in Mexico, and Bolsonaro in Brazil. In the United States, the fusion of the religious right with post-liberal anti-democratic currents transformed the internal structure of the Republican Party [7]. Even Japan—long regarded as insulated from such dynamics—experienced a nationwide surge of outsider populism in the 2024–2025 electoral cycle.

Therefore, this chapter begins with Europe, where these dynamics first intensified, and uses it as a reference point to compare the United States and Japan. For Japan, the analysis draws on the 2025 national election examined in Chapter "Japan's 2025 Populist Turn from Outside".

1.1 Analytical perspective: Outsider/insider dynamics and the religious dimension

Europe has seen the electoral mainstreaming of radical right parties; the United States has undergone an internal populist transformation of a major party; and Japan has experienced an unprecedented rise of outsider challenger parties. These developments indicate that populism has become a structural challenge shared across democracies [8].

A particularly striking feature of this global transformation is its religious or quasi-religious dimension. Contrary to earlier theories predicting secularization, contemporary populist movements—from European cultural Christianity to American evangelicalism and White Christian Nationalism to Shinto-inflected cultural nationalism in Japan—demonstrate that religion remains a central reservoir for symbolic boundary-making and political mobilization [7, 9].

Simultaneously, the erosion of intermediary organizations—labor unions, mass-membership parties, and religious associations—has created a political environment in which outsider politics can flourish. Yet insider actors have not disappeared; instead, they increasingly appropriate populist rhetoric to preserve dominance. Thus, populism today emerges from the dynamic interaction between *outsider populism* and *insider populism*, a relationship insufficiently theorized in global scholarship.

1.2 Why comparative? Reassessing Europe, the United States, and Japan

Despite the rapid expansion of research on populism, existing scholarship remains disproportionately Eurocentric. Leading frameworks—thin-centered ideology [1],

cultural backlash [2], and national populism [3]—were developed primarily through European cases. These frameworks leave key questions underexplored:

- How does institutionalized religious mobilization reshape party competition (USA)?
- How do civilizational identity claims—cultural Christianity or Shinto nationalism—structure conflict?
- Why did Japan experience a sudden nationwide rise of outsider populism in 2024–2025?
- How do insider and outsider populism interact across institutional contexts?
- How does democratic backsliding occur *within* democratic institutions instead of via regime replacement [10–12]?

A comparative analysis clarifies region-specific pathways and structural commonalities, situating Japan within a genuinely global context rather than treating it as exceptional.

1.3 Positioning within international literature

Although global research has advanced, conceptual gaps remain regarding the religious dimension, insider–outsider interactions, and democratic erosion. Mizushima’s concept of “Outsider Politics” [4] represents a significant but under-recognized contribution in English-language scholarship. Building on this, the chapter incorporates Masao Maruyama’s influential distinction between “Fascism from Above” and “Fascism from Below” [13], using it to conceptualize insider populism—top-down mobilization by dominant-party elites.

Extending these arguments, the chapter introduces the notion of Hybrid Authoritarianism, describing cases where outsider mobilization and insider-led centralization interact to produce democratic backsliding. This synthesizes developments in Europe, the U.S., and Japan, expanding international debates concerning democracy and autocratization [14].

Contemporary populism has become a defining feature of political competition across advanced democracies, yet its relationship to authoritarianism remains theoretically unsettled. While populism is often treated either as a democratic corrective or as a transient protest phenomenon, recent developments in Europe, the United States, and Japan suggest the emergence of more durable and institutionally embedded configurations. This chapter does not argue that contemporary populism constitutes a return to historical fascism. Instead, it asks whether certain ideological echoes—when combined with the hybridization of outsider mobilization and insider-led governance—justify revisiting the question of fascism in a transformed and hybrid form. Through this framework, the chapter seeks to clarify how contemporary populism can hollow out the substantive content of democratic institutions without abandoning their formal structures, raising the question of whether we are witnessing a new, hybridized variant of authoritarian politics rather than a simple repetition of past regimes. This chapter provisionally employs the concept of hybrid authoritarianism, while the notion of ‘hybrid fascism’ is introduced later as a heuristic refinement.

1.4 Structure of the chapter

Beginning with Europe (Section 2), the chapter extracts four core features and compares the United States and Japan (Sections 3 and 4):

1. Expansion of left- and right-wing populism
2. Welfare chauvinism
3. Religious identity
4. Outsider politics

Section 5 highlights differences in these dimensions and proposes a typology. The chapter contributes by the following:

1. Systematically comparing populism across regions
2. Analyzing the religious dimension
3. Reinterpreting Japanese populism as a hybrid variant
4. Developing a typology based on insider/outsider dynamics
5. Proposing the heuristic concept of Hybrid Authoritarianism/Fascism for examining contemporary populism from a historical perspective

The “enemies of democracy” refer not only to authoritarianism or totalitarianism but also to hybrid regimes in which authoritarian dynamics advance internally [10, 11]. By tracing the trajectories of three regions, the chapter develops a framework for understanding emerging forms of new authoritarianism and hybrid fascism.

2. Europe: Welfare chauvinism, outsider politics, and religious identity

2.1 The expansion of left- and right-wing populism

A striking feature of contemporary European politics is the decline of mainstream parties and the expansion of both left-wing and right-wing populist parties. Established parties that once played central roles across national political systems have declined regardless of ideological orientation. Meanwhile, radical populist parties and outsider politicians—who foreground anti-establishment and anti-mainstream politics—have significantly expanded their support, in some cases even winning governmental power.

As shown in **Figure 1**, populist parties that had remained marginal until the 2000s expanded their support across countries during the 2010s, both on the left and the right. By the 2020s, they collectively reached nearly 30% of the vote share.

Although right-wing and left-wing populists frequently take opposing positions on issues such as immigration and refugee policy, wealth taxation, and responses to

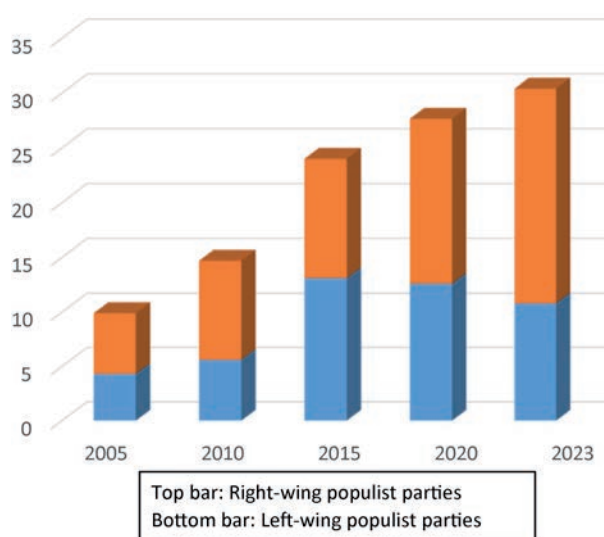


Figure 1.
 Average vote share (%) of populist parties in eight continental European countries.

the Gaza conflict, they nonetheless share several essential features. First, both adopt an anti-establishment stance, rejecting mainstream parties and politics and calling for radical reform. Second, as one commentator puts it, both advance “patriotic” claims. Populism, across both left and right, tends toward nationalism.

That right-wing populists are “patriotic” is self-evident: they often deploy national symbols such as flags and anthems, praise “national traditions,” and advocate the exclusion of immigrants and refugees under the banner of putting their own nation first. What is more interesting, however, is that left-wing populists are no less “patriotic” in that they also place “their own people” first. For left-wing populists, established left parties, especially social democratic parties, have become complicit in global capitalism and neoliberalism, betraying the working classes of their own nations. From their perspective, the workers and vulnerable populations of their own country ought to be prioritized, and the political elites who obediently accept globalization or follow EU bureaucrats become enemies of the people, regardless of left or right. Thus, left-wing populist claims gravitate toward nationalism. To varying degrees, populists on both sides are critical of globalization, skeptical of EU integration, and nationalist insofar as they prioritize “their own nationals.”

In this sense, as in contemporary Japan (discussed later), both extremes of the ideological spectrum—left-wing and right-wing populists—are growing in support, squeezing the centrist mainstream parties from both sides.

2.2 Right-wing populism and welfare chauvinism

Next, special attention should be given to right-wing populist parties, whose expansion in recent years has been particularly remarkable.

Right-wing populist parties in which champion anti-immigrant and anti-refugee positions have surged to become rivals—or even surpass—established major parties in many countries. In France, Marine Le Pen advanced to the final round of the 2022

presidential election, securing over 40% of the vote. In Germany, AfD (Alternative for Germany) rose to become the second-largest party in the 2025 federal election. In Italy, *Brothers of Italy* became the largest party in the 2022 election, leading to Giorgia Meloni's premiership. In Sweden, the Sweden Democrats rose to the second-largest party and entered government through external cooperation. In the Netherlands, the right-wing populist Freedom Party became the largest party in the 2023 general election and formed a coalition government in 2024. In Finland, Denmark, Belgium, Austria, and other small and mid-sized countries, right-wing populists have similarly expanded and, in many cases, reached governmental power. In Central and Eastern Europe, EU-skeptical right-wing leaders and parties have gained significant support, generating discord within the EU over issues such as support for Ukraine. In Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orban has held power for more than 10 years, violating the rule of law and strengthening xenophobic policies, almost becoming the opposition party within the EU. In Romania, an unknown right-wing outsider came first in the initial round of the 2024 presidential election, generating shock. Even though it has not yet secured large numbers of seats at the national level, the United Kingdom has seen the Reform UK Party, led by Nigel Farage—the “architect” of Brexit—emerge as the largest party in the 2025 local elections. Riding on the unpopularity of both Labour and the Conservatives, it now enjoys the highest polling numbers in the country. It is expected to become the “eye of the storm” in the next general election, causing deep anxiety within the governing Labour Party.

These new right-wing populist parties place on the agenda topics that established parties struggle to address—immigration and refugees, EU integration, and globalization—issues that can broadly be characterized as “national” themes. While stirring dissatisfaction with existing politics, they criticize established parties in sweeping terms, call for resistance to globalization, demand stricter regulations on immigrants and refugees, advocate limiting the rights of foreigners, and call for halting further EU integration. That such openly nationalist parties have become mainstream represents an unprecedented development in postwar European politics.

What is especially noteworthy is that right-wing populist parties, despite their diverse origins, appear to be converging, albeit with national variations, on what political science terms *welfare chauvinism*, which seems to be a significant factor behind their electoral successes.

Welfare chauvinism can be broadly defined as a stance that prioritizes “the welfare of one’s own nationals” while calling for the exclusion of immigrants, refugees, and foreigners. Traditionally, “the right” has tended to align with market-oriented policies and to adopt anti-welfare-state positions. Right-wing populists, however, differ from conventional right-wing actors in that they emphasize the living conditions of their own nationals and seek support particularly among the lower and middle classes. In recent years, amid inflation, rising living costs, soaring rents, and housing shortages, they have advanced the claim that “the government and mainstream parties neglect the welfare and housing needs of nationals while providing generous protection and housing guarantees to immigrants and refugees,” which has attracted significant support.

This combination of “exclusion” and “welfare”—a policy package that mixes elements traditionally associated with both “right” and “left”—has strong appeal among voters dissatisfied with established parties and has contributed substantially to the electoral success of these groups. Hence, welfare chauvinism has come to be called a “winning formula.”

2.3 The age of ‘religious identity’?

Another noteworthy aspect concerns the relationship between populism and religiosity.

Although modern technology has advanced beyond expectations and AI now appears to surpass human cognition, contemporary political leaders display a surprising degree of “religiosity.” The leaders of the world’s two major military powers—the United States and Russia—namely, President Trump and President Putin, are both self-professed Christians. Trump is affiliated with Protestant churches, while Putin is a believer in the Russian Orthodox Church; both publicly emphasize Christian values (regardless of their private convictions). In countries where Christians constitute a large share of the population, demonstrating a commitment to Christianity in national governance can enhance political legitimacy.

In Europe as well, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, is Catholic. Most European leaders, including Germany’s Chancellor Merz, are Christian. Even in contemporary Europe—often perceived as secular and liberal—Christianity remains an essential source of identity among political elites. Notably, Japan’s former Prime Minister Ishiba is also a Protestant (Presbyterian), meaning that during his tenure the top national leaders of Japan, the United States, Europe, and Russia were all publicly acknowledged Christians—an exceptionally rare phenomenon in world history (though not unprecedented).

Beyond Christianity, many of today’s globally influential leaders—such as Israel’s Prime Minister Netanyahu and India’s Prime Minister Modi—are devout adherents of Judaism and Hinduism, respectively.

Thus, many contemporary “strongmen”—figures who shape global politics, such as Trump, Putin, Netanyahu, and Modi—possess strong “religious identities.” Moreover, they do not confine their faith to their personal inner life but appear to pursue forms of national integration grounded in religion. Paradoxically, in the secular and technologically advanced twenty-first century, religious identity—often regarded as premodern—appears to be increasingly expected to serve as an essential mechanism for national unity.

2.4 From ‘religious organizations’ to ‘religious identity’

Considering the recent rise of right-wing populism in Europe, the issue of religious identity is of critical importance.

During the twentieth century—especially its latter half—Christian democratic parties held dominant positions in many western European countries. In West Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Austria, and France (Fourth Republic), Christian democratic parties repeatedly entered government and often served as the largest party, producing prime ministers. Their support base rested on extensive Christian organizational networks—associations of believers, youth organizations, Christian labor unions, Christian farmers’ associations, and other groups that mobilized the faithful and delivered electoral victories.

Religious organizations supported Christian democratic parties, and these parties, in turn, governed as ruling parties. This was one of the central pillars of postwar European politics.

However, in recent years, close cooperation between religious organizations and mainstream parties has diminished—much like in Japan. As secularization and church disengagement have progressed in Europe, particularly among younger generations, the number of Christian believers has steadily declined. Correspondingly, faith-based

associations, Christian labor unions, women's groups, and youth organizations have lost strength. Christian democratic parties, which depended on these groups as their support base, have declined in most countries except a few such as Germany.

Yet the weakening of organized religion does not diminish religion's role as an anchor of "religious identity." Since the early twenty-first century, especially after the 9/11 attacks, Islamic extremism has attracted global attention, and issues surrounding Muslim immigrants and refugees have become increasingly salient in Europe. As Islam has come to be perceived as incompatible with "Western society," the counter-image of "Christian identity" as the foundational principle of Western civilization has gained renewed appeal.

Marine Le Pen openly identifies as Christian, and Meloni strongly emphasizes her Catholic faith. In central and eastern Europe, right-wing populist leaders in Hungary and Poland explicitly highlight the importance of Christianity. Even when right-wing populist leaders themselves are not Christian, they invoke "Judeo-Christian tradition" to argue that it is under threat from Muslim immigrants. These leaders assert the need to "protect the West" and "protect the nation" socially, culturally, and religiously from Islam, drawing heavily on Christian identity.

Thus, in the populist age, nationalism intersects with religious identity, revealing new trajectories.

2.5 The rise of 'outsider politics'

When considering the expansion of populist politics, particular attention must be paid to the strengthening of "outsider" characteristics among emerging parties and politicians. Argentina's President Milei is well known as a "political outsider," and some argue that most Latin American presidents today can be classified as outsiders.

Broadly speaking, outsiders are political actors who emerge from the periphery of the political order and criticize established parties and politicians from an "external" standpoint, calling for the "transformation" of existing politics.

Two major factors explain why outsiders have moved to the forefront.

The first reason is the decline of social structures that once supported established parties—particularly intermediary organizations. As discussed earlier, religious organizations have weakened, and their affiliated parties have shrunk. Similar trends can be observed in labor unions, employers' organizations, farmers' associations, and other groups. In the twentieth century, when stable relationships between such organizations and established parties formed the backbone of political systems, outsiders had limited opportunities to gain political visibility. The "presence or absence of organizational backing" largely determined electoral outcomes; thus, aspiring politicians often had to suppress their outsider identity to gain organizational support.

However, in the twenty-first century, as organizations have contracted across the board, organizational backing no longer guarantees electoral success. Instead, politicians must foreground salient issues and appeal directly to unaffiliated voters—a trend particularly pronounced among newcomers. To mobilize voters who reject established parties and vested interests, it is effective to craft a heroic outsider image that confronts entrenched elites and calls for their destruction.

The second reason is the transformation of the media system. In the twentieth century, newspapers, television, radio, magazines, and established parties collectively formed a relatively stable system. Although conflicts existed, both sides generally agreed to maintain mutual cooperation. In the twenty-first century, however, the rise and rapid expansion of outsider media—including internet broadcasting channels, individually

produced videos, social media, blogs, and more—have weakened the influence of traditional media. Outsider politicians challenging existing politics have successfully leveraged these new media platforms to reach voters more easily and, in some cases, to dramatically increase their visibility. Even without party organizations or affiliated groups, it has become possible to mobilize unaffiliated voters through online appeals.

The rise of outsider media and outsider politicians thus threatens the status of mainstream media and mainstream parties. Moreover, this shift from mainstream to outsider media parallels—and reinforces—the transformation from “religious organizational politics” to “identity-based religious politics.” Outsider media frequently employ impactful images, videos, and direct messaging—tools highly suited to transmitting religious messages. Whereas religious organizations traditionally maintain group cohesion through internal newsletters and institutional publications, secularization and organizational decline have diminished these channels. In contrast, the modes of communication used by outsider media—particularly when intertwined with anti-Islamic narratives, the exclusion of perceived “outsiders,” or ideological battles against “the left”—possess strong mobilizing power. Amid the large-scale transformation of the media environment, religion, equipped with new media technologies, may be acquiring renewed vitality as a form of “religious identity” that extends beyond traditional organizational boundaries.

3. Outsiders’ takeover of major parties: Left- and right-wing populism

American populism has a distinctly outsider character. President Trump emerged not from professional politics but from real estate and entertainment, representing a fundamental deviation from conventional political elites—a classic case of outsider populism penetrating an established party. The extraordinary influence of Charlie Kirk, a 31-year-old activist who became a central voice of American conservatism and the Christian right before his assassination in 2025, would also have been inconceivable without the digital ecosystem of podcasts and social media that enables non-elite actors to mobilize mass support.

Yet unlike Europe—where populist figures typically form new parties—Trumpism did not emerge outside the party system. The MAGA movement (Make America Great Again) began as outsider populism attacking the Republican Party from the outside but eventually captured its organizational core from within. Grassroots anger (anti-immigration, anti-globalization, anti-elite), the mobilizing capacity of evangelical networks, and a new media sphere centered on Fox, X, and podcasts converged to create a self-defined “anti-establishment faction within the Republican Party,” pushing aside traditional party elites.

In this respect, Trumpism represents an insider-outsider hybrid rather than a purely external challenger.

In response, currents of socialism and social democracy—previously marginal in American politics—gained traction within the Democratic Party. Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez advocate democratic socialism and condemn oligarchic politics under Trump; they are frequently described as left-wing populists. Zoran Manidani, an Indian American Muslim elected mayor of New York, likewise identifies as a democratic socialist and represents another outsider current.

As the moderate Democratic mainstream remains internally fragmented, these outsider figures have become central to the anti-Trump coalition, creating a polarized two-front populist landscape.

3.1 Welfare chauvinism and authoritarian political philosophy

Even if it does not constitute a fully coherent public philosophy, the Trump administration displays a distinctive political logic. From the standpoint of political theory, “deal-making politics” under America First is a form of national egoistic utilitarianism—maximizing the welfare of U.S. citizens regardless of costs imposed on other states.

A clear manifestation is found in Trump’s tariff policies. High tariffs were imposed not only on rivals such as China but also on allies including Europe and Japan, generating significant international friction. Trump even floated distributing several thousand dollars per person from tariff revenue in 2026—an economic-nationalist redistribution scheme grounded in welfare chauvinism.

At the same time, the administration reflects a strong libertarian orientation: prioritizing market mechanisms, reducing redistribution to vulnerable groups, and striving toward a minimal state. This tendency, already evident in the first Trump administration, became more pronounced in the second. Among Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, a sharpened variant—techno-libertarianism—emerged, often supportive of Trump [15, 16].

Peter Thiel has explicitly argued that “freedom and democracy are no longer compatible” [17] and has criticized democratic governance as structurally inefficient, later promoting alternative “zones of freedom” such as cyberspace, outer space, and sea steading [18]. Elon Musk—once Thiel’s collaborator—purchased X (Twitter) in the name of absolute free expression and launched a private space-development enterprise. The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), with its mass dismissal of federal employees and drastic cuts to agencies handling health, education, and science, reflects this techno-libertarian critique of the administrative state.

An even more radical development is neo-reactionism (Curtis Yarvin, known online as *Moldbug*), which rejects democratic politics, egalitarianism, and liberalism. Yarvin’s writings [19, 20] propose governing the state as a joint-stock corporation under a single sovereign shareholder (“neo-cameralism”). This pushes libertarian logic to the extreme, replacing rights-based governance with technocratic authority.

In the United Kingdom, the Dark Enlightenment (Nick Land) rejects Enlightenment ideals of reason and equality, articulating an explicitly anti-democratic worldview [21].

These movements differ from classical conservatism or neoconservatism. They justify CEO-style governance, argue that democracy is structurally inefficient, and constitute openly authoritarian ideological currents.

3.2 “Aristopopulism” as syncretic authoritarianism: A post-liberal theory of regime transformation

One of the intellectual currents influencing the Trump administration is post-liberalism, whose leading theorist is Patrick J. Deneen. In *Why Liberalism Failed* [22], Deneen argues that liberalism—grounded in freedom and individualism—has produced homogenization, inequality, and the erosion of social bonds (family, community, religion, nation). Both classical liberalism (Locke) and progressive liberalism (Dewey), he contends, severed individuals from nature, place, and tradition, creating a self-reinforcing liberal elite (“liberacracy”).

Liberalism thus “succeeded” in expanding individual autonomy but thereby created the conditions of its own failure. Deneen predicts that this failure will likely yield

either a liberacratic dictatorship or an authoritarian regime. His alternative emphasizes community-based customs, local economies, and civic participation.

Deneen—an adviser to Vice President Vance—advances not simply a critique of progressive liberalism but a rejection of the entire liberal tradition. Empirically, post-liberalism functions as anti-liberalism.

In *Regime Change* [23], he presents a blueprint for a post-liberal political order and introduces a key concept: aristopopulism. The *aristoi* (“the excellent”) represent a renewed aristocracy empowered by vigorous populism; aristopopulism fuses popular legitimacy with aristocratic governance.

Deneen frames this as a modern mixed constitution—an alliance of “the many” and “the few.” However, substantively, it justifies a hierarchical order in which democratic institutions remain formally intact while decision-making and value formation are concentrated in a small elite.

This design mirrors syncretic authoritarianism: an ideological fusion of populist rhetoric, hierarchical governance, and moralized authority.

Because the regime retains elections and legislatures while concentrating executive authority and moral power in the hands of a few, aristopopulism corresponds closely to hybrid authoritarianism—systems that maintain democratic procedures but hollow out their substantive content.

Thus, aristopopulism provides a normative blueprint for elite-led, post-liberal authoritarianism.

3.3 The religious dimension underpinning populism: White Christian nationalism

Post-liberalism’s Catholic influence is significant. In *Regime Change*, Deneen characterizes the “institutions of separation”—including separation of powers and church–state separation—as “problems of dissolution,” and advocates “institutions of integration,” positioning the nation as the locus for integrating religion into political authority. This implies a potential overturning of church-state separation.

In practice, the Trump administration exhibited strong features of White Christian Nationalism (WCN), an ideology that blends ethnoracial identity, Christian myth, hierarchical order, and authoritarian governance [7]. The creation of a “Faith Office” within the administration exemplifies how religion became embedded not only in mobilization but in governance.

A vast evangelical network links local congregations, national ministries, media platforms, and donor organizations. These networks merge with the Republican Party’s internal power structures, generating both grassroots populism and elite-driven authoritarian tendencies.

Evangelicals have consolidated a political identity grounded in:

- America as a nation chosen by God
- Defense of the traditional family; opposition to abortion and LGBT rights
- Opposition to multiculturalism
- Infusing education and law with Christian values
- Restoring a “lost America” rooted in ethno-cultural unity

Compared with Europe—where religion functions essentially as cultural identity—U.S. evangelicalism operates as an organized political institution, shaping candidate selection, judicial appointments, education policy, and reproductive-rights legislation.

This produces a form of syncretic authoritarianism in which religious, cultural, and political authority are blended. Whereas Europe's religious politics are symbolic and identity-based, in the United States, they are structural and governing.

3.4 Hybrid new authoritarianism

The ideas supporting the second Trump administration can be summarized in three components:

1. Anti-individualist moral authoritarianism rejecting liberal-democratic values
2. Anti-democratic executive aggrandizement treating democratic procedures as inefficient
3. Religious authoritarianism imposing moral order through state institutions

Taken together, these currents form a composite structure of anti-liberal-democratic authoritarianism + religious authoritarianism.

In practice, the administration pursued:

- Consolidation of executive power (Schedule Policy/Career (Formerly “Schedule F”))
- Intervention in the DOJ, FBI, and federal agencies
- Pressure on media and educational institutions
- Expansion of immigrant exclusion and anti-multicultural policies
- Incorporation of evangelical demands into state policymaking

Yet the Constitution formally remains in place. This is authoritarianization from within democracy—transforming democratic institutions through executive centralization, bureaucratic capture, and religiously coded interventions rather than abolishing them outright.

The resulting configuration resembles global cases of competitive authoritarianism: elections and legislatures remain, but civic freedoms erode, and executive power expands.

Thus, contemporary American populism constitutes a hybrid new authoritarianism: a regime type defined by “democratic institutions + substantive authoritarian governance.”

If entrenched, this form would crystallize into a hybrid authoritarian regime and become an “enemy” of liberal democracy.

This section positions Deneen's post-liberal theory within the broader genealogy of authoritarian populism and prepares the ground for Section 5's comparative analysis of Christian nationalism in the United States and Japan.

Ideological current	Core orientation	Model of political authority	Relation to democracy	Regime tendency
(Ordinary) libertarianism	Market freedom, minimum state	Constitutional–pluralist governance	Electoral democracy	Majoritarian Democracy (market-liberal)
National utilitarianism	National interest	Government-centered calculation	Electoral democracy	Majoritarian democracy with instrumental logic
Techno-libertarianism	Enterprise-like Efficiency	CEO-style technocratic governance	anti-democratic	Non-democratic authoritarianism
Dark enlightenment (neo-reactionism)	Anti-egalitarianism, rejection of popular sovereignty	CEO-monarchical authority	Explicitly anti-liberal and democratic	Non-democratic authoritarianism
Post-liberalism (Common good conservatism)	Common good, moral order, elite guidance	Aristopopulism (elite–people fusion)	Mixed constitutionalism	Hybrid authoritarianism
White Christian Nationalism	Personalist leader veneration, sacralized national identity	Charismatic-quasi-religious authority	Electoral democracy, but obscure church-state separation	Hybrid populism with authoritarian drift

Table 1.
Ideological currents and regime tendencies in contemporary American populism.

To clarify the ideological diversity within American populism and its differentiated implications for political governance, **Table 1** maps major ideological currents onto their corresponding models of regime tendencies.

While many voters remain anchored in ordinary libertarian or utilitarian democratic preferences, ideologically articulated currents such as post-liberalism and techno-libertarianism exert disproportionate influence on elite discourse and institutional trajectories.

This ideological-institutional linkage helps explain why the American case exhibits a more direct pathway from populist mobilization to hybrid authoritarian tendencies than is observed in Europe.

4. Japan: “Insider/outsider” populism and nationalistic Shinto

4.1 Polarization into left- and right-wing populism

In Japan in 2025, the Sanseitō, which foregrounded criticism of foreigners in its campaign for the House of Councilors election, made significant gains and generated a powerful shock as the first full-scale advance of a right-wing populist party in postwar Japanese national politics. The emergence of a powerful party situated “to the right of the LDP” that secured a substantial number of seats was itself an unprecedented development in the postwar era. The Sanseitō’s nationalist “Japanese First” platform strongly evokes the recent right-wing populist parties in various European countries that advocate “our country first” [3].

Since the founding of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in 1955 through the mid-2020s, Japan has been characterized by a one-party-dominant system under the LDP and was often treated as an “exception” among advanced democracies [24]. However, recent changes in Japanese politics share many features with developments in Europe, particularly the rise of right-wing populist parties and the decline of established parties. The coalition government centered on the LDP, which had once appeared rock-solid, lost its majority both in the 2024 general election and the 2025 Upper House election, resulting in the formation of a minority government—an unusually weak governing coalition by Japanese standards. The era of LDP one-party dominance appears to have come to an end.

In October 2025, Sanae Takaichi was elected president of the LDP. Contrary to most media expectations, a figure known as a right-winger within the party was chosen. This outcome partly reflected the party’s sense of crisis over the loss of conservative voters to the Sanseitō in the Upper House election. Moreover, when the centrist Kōmeitō, the LDP’s long-time coalition partner, withdrew from the coalition in the same month, President Takaichi decided to form a coalition with the center-right Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Innovation Party). This enabled her to become Japan’s first female prime minister, but the new LDP-Ishin coalition has advanced conservative policies on national security and immigration that extend beyond those of previous governments. Japanese politics has thus entered an unprecedented phase of fluidity, making comparisons with developments in Europe particularly meaningful.

Japan has long been regarded as a country where populism has been unusually weak or confined to local politics [4]. Yet, as mentioned above, in addition to the Sanseitō, parties that criticize established parties and advance populist claims—such as the Democratic Party for the People (DPP) and Reiwa Shinsengumi—expanded their support in the July 2025 Upper House election. It appears that the wave of populism has now reached Japan in earnest. Reiwa Shinsengumi corresponds to a left-wing populist party in the Japanese context, but its stance toward nationalism is clearly distinct from that of conventional left-wing parties. From the party’s very name, combining Reiwa (the current era name) and Shinsengumi (a samurai-era corps), to leader Taro Yamamoto’s past attempt at a direct appeal to the Emperor, there is a clear resonance of “nationalism from the left.”

4.2 Right-wing populism, welfare chauvinism, and nationalistic Shinto

Among right-wing populist forces, the Sanseitō appears to have studied the “success stories” of European welfare chauvinism and straightforwardly applied this “winning formula.” The party not only called for restrictions on the acceptance of foreigners but also proposed child-rearing benefits targeted exclusively at “families with Japanese nationality” and advocated tax cuts and reductions in social insurance premiums. This combination of limiting foreigners and prioritizing the welfare of “one’s own nationals” fits the definition of welfare chauvinism precisely. The slogan “Japanese First,” echoing “America First,” further underscores the value of comparing the Sanseitō’s policies and claims with those in Europe and the United States.

Regarding religion, postwar Japan has shared important similarities with Europe. The LDP’s support base included influential religious organizations such as the Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership, Rissho Kōsei-kai, Seicho-no-Ie, and Reiyūkai, all of which played powerful electoral roles. The Unification Church also formed part of this network. Kōmeitō’s support base is Soka Gakkai, whose members engaged in intensive electoral mobilization. Behind the LDP-Kōmeitō coalition stood multiple

religious organizations; in this sense, religious groups were in fact among the hidden protagonists of postwar politics [24].

Recently, however, many of the religious organizations that supported the LDP have shown declining mobilizing power. Some, such as Rissho Kōsei-kai and Seichō-no-Ie, have withdrawn their support for the LDP. The Unification Church became the target of fierce criticism after its deep ties with the LDP were exposed. These developments weakened the LDP's vote-gathering capacity and accelerated its decline. Soka Gakkai, which supports Kōmeitō, is also experiencing an aging membership, and its capacity to sustain intensive electoral mobilization has been questioned. The steep decline in Kōmeitō's proportional-representation vote totals clearly demonstrates the weakening of religious mobilization.

As in Europe, established parties that rely on religious organizations have struggled, while the Sanseitō—whose appeals rest on “religious identity”—has broadened its support. Although a powerful religious organization does not back the party, it consistently invokes the “Land of Rice Ears” and the “Eight Million Gods,” foregrounding a Shinto-based cultural identity; in August 2025, its legislators made a collective visit to Yasukuni Shrine. It appears to appeal to Shinto-based Japanese cultural “unity” as an anchor of identity against the perceived “threat” of foreigners and as a marker of group belonging, separating Japanese from non-Japanese.

The relationship with Shinto-based organizations became a significant issue under the Abe administration. The Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership and the right-wing group Nippon Kaigi (Japan Conference) wielded substantial influence over the government, and most cabinet ministers were affiliated with these organizations. These groups inherit the legacy of prewar state Shinto nationalism and advocate right-wing constitutional revision. Prime Minister Abe himself held right-wing views, advocated a “departure from the postwar regime,” sought to revise the pacifist postwar constitution, revised the Basic Act on Education, and pushed through security legislation enabling the exercise of collective self-defense. The LDP's 2012 draft constitution included provisions recognizing the Emperor as head of state, revisions to weaken fundamental human rights clauses, and explicit provisions regarding the Self-Defense Forces.

Sanae Takaichi, who became prime minister in 2025, has clearly inherited Abe's politics. She is strongly committed to visiting Yasukuni Shrine and emphasizes a Shinto-based identity in her political stance, which forms part of the basis for her strong support among conservative voters. In this way, the right wing within the LDP stands in the lineage of nationalistic Shinto, and extreme right-wing parties such as the Sanseitō and the Conservative Party also embody strongly Shinto-inflected thinking.

4.3 Populism “from above” (insider) and “from below” (outsider)

Japan has now entered a new phase in which populist parties are no longer confined to local politics. The defining feature of the 2025 elections was not merely a change of government or a routine anti-incumbent cycle but the emergence of multiple outsider populist parties that secured significant vote shares nationwide. Several nationally organized populist parties emerged as actors capable of aggregating dissatisfaction, anxiety, anger, hatred, and political distrust at the national level. This outcome marks a qualitative turning point in which Japan has joined the historical trend that has destabilized long-established Western democracies since the late 2010s.

Japan has long been regarded as a “deviant case” in comparative politics. Under the LDP's one-party dominance, electoral support relied on a distinctive form of political linkage—clientelism—rather than clear ideological or programmatic appeals. Support

was sustained through personal support organizations (*kōenkai*), brokerage of particularistic benefits, and dense social embeddedness. Based on this structure, scholars interpreted Japan as possessing institutional and cultural buffers that prevented the eruption of large-scale national populism. Thus, while populist parties in Europe and the United States rose as national-level challengers, Japanese populism was thought to be confined to subnational politics and understood primarily as a localized style of protest.

Yet this conventional view is incomplete. Former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi mobilized mass support under the slogan “Destroy the LDP” and maintained long-term power through neoliberal postal-privatization reforms. Although a Democratic Party government briefly took office, the LDP–Kōmeitō coalition soon returned to power, and the Abe administration pursued nationalist policies, advanced authoritarianization, and maintained long-term rule. In political science, these are regarded as forms of populism: Koizumi’s politics correspond to libertarian populism, while Abe’s represent nationalistic/authoritarian populism.

In recent years, however, corruption scandals associated with the Abe faction contributed to ruling-party defeats and the loss of the majority from 2024 onward. The 2025 Upper House election thus became a structural breaking point in Japanese politics.

Populist currents first emerged at the local level. In Osaka/Kansai, Nippon Ishin no Kai seized local power and built a hegemonic regime. In Nagoya, Genzei Nippon (Tax Reduction Japan) gained support under Mayor Takashi Kawamura; in Tokyo, Tomin First no Kai Tokyoites First Party emerged under Governor Yuriko Koike. In the 2024 Tokyo gubernatorial election, candidate Shinji Ishimaru performed strongly, while in Hyogo the victory of former Governor Motohiko Saito also reflected outsider appeal. These movements exemplify what Mizushima conceptualizes as “outsider politics” [4].

Although Nippon Ishin no Kai has attempted to become a nationwide party, its success has been uneven. By contrast, in the 2025 Upper House election, far-right exclusionist parties such as the Sanseitō and the Conservative Party made significant gains. Together with the National Conservative Party, outsider populist parties became national-level actors. Their rise cannot be understood without the role of outsider media—SNS, YouTube, and online influencers.

After the election, the Takaichi administration was formed in cooperation with Nippon Ishin no Kai. Thus, the former dominant party, the LDP, joined with a populist outsider party to create a right-wing governing coalition.

This configuration recalls prewar Japan. Unlike Germany and Italy, where fascism arose from outsider movements, prewar Japanese fascism combined outsider pressure with elite decision-making. Civilian right-wing activists attacked political elites, while under this pressure, Fumimaro Konoe formed a military-bureaucratic fascist regime. Masao Maruyama therefore described Japanese fascism as “fascism from above,” in contrast to European “fascism from below” [13].

The schema remains suggestive today. The leader of the NHK Party, an extremely populist party, was arrested in 2025 for defamation, resembling Maruyama’s notion of a “lawless man.” Nippon Ishin no Kai and the Sanseitō constitute “populism from below,” while the Koizumi, Abe, and Takaichi administrations represent “populism from above.” The coalition between the LDP and Nippon Ishin no Kai thus signifies a convergence of populism from above and populism from below—a pattern of vertical hybridization.

Furthermore, the LDP briefly formed a joint Diet caucus with the NHK Party, indicating a qualitative transformation in the ruling bloc.

Taken together, these developments can be organized into the following four types of Japanese populism (Table 2).

Type	Period/Representative cases	Structural position	Emotional basis	Conceptual type
Libertarian Reform Populism	Koizumi era	Insider (within the LDP-centered regime)	Optimistic modernization	Populism from above
Authoritarian Nationalistic Populism	Abe era/Takaichi administration	Insider (within the LDP-centered regime)	Symbolic identity consolidation + order politics	Populism from above
Regional Outsider Populism	Nippon Ishin no Kai (Osaka), Tomin First (Tokyo), Genzei Nippon (Nagoya), etc.	Outsider (anti-LDP)	Region-based identity centered on major metropolitan areas	Populism from below
Nationwide Outsider Populism	Nationwide rise since 2024 (Sanseitō, Conservative Party, Democratic Party for the People, etc.)	Outsider (non-establishment)	Resentment, anger, anxiety	Populism from below

Source: Made by the author.

Table 2.
Four types of populism in contemporary Japan.

This fourfold classification shows that Japan has historically harbored two distinct forms of elite-led populism within the regime and that in recent years outsider populism first emerged at the regional level and, since 2024, as a national electoral force. Regional outsider populism is grounded in regional identity and often takes the form of ideological libertarianism (Nippon Ishin no Kai, Genzei Nippon) or region-first doctrines like “First” (Tomin First). Nationwide outsider populism, by contrast, tends toward far-right exclusionism similar to European populism, although the Democratic Party for the People occupies an intermediate position between the established centrist-left Constitutional Democratic Party and the cluster of outsider populist parties.

The distinction between insider (within the regime) and outsider (outside the regime) populism is analytically crucial for the segmentation analysis based on well-being (WB) developed in the Chapter “Japan’s 2025 Populist Turn from Outside”. The emotional foundation of outsider populism—resentment generated by WB depletion—rests on motivational mechanisms entirely different from those underlying libertarian populism, grounded in high WB, and authoritarian populism, grounded in symbolic identity integration. The year 2025 was the first historical moment in which all these forms of populism were simultaneously visible nationwide.

5. Are we still living in the century of fascism?

One of the authors (Masaya Kobayashi) previously wrote the 2016 article “Are We Still Living in the Century of Fascism? — Political Cycles and New Authoritarianism in Japan [25].” For this chapter, ‘neo-fascism’ refers to hybrid political configurations that maintain electoral and parliamentary institutions while eroding their substantive democratic content through authoritarian rule resembling interwar fascism.

In comparative politics, concepts such as neo-corporatism, neo-clientelism, neo-patrimonialism, and, in political theory, neo-liberalism frequently appear. The proliferation of such “neo-” concepts suggests that contemporary politics is witnessing the re-emergence—under transformed conditions—of premodern political forms and interwar authoritarian tendencies [14, 26]. Across the world, democratic backsliding has advanced in the form of “competitive authoritarianism” and “new authoritarianism (neo-authoritarianism)” [10, 11, 26].

Inspired by Philippe C. Schmitter’s classic question, “Still the Century of Corporatism?” [27], the 2016 article posed its own question to examine whether fascist tendencies might reappear in altered form in the twenty-first century. Given the global rise of far-right populism and authoritarian democracy—including in Japan—this earlier work warned that fascism might not return in its classical form, but rather as hybrid neo-fascism: regimes that maintain electoral and parliamentary institutions while progressively hollowing out their substantive democratic functions [13].

5.1 Three patterns in Europe, the United States, and Japan, and neo-fascism/authoritarianism

Nearly 10 years after that earlier article was written, the global context has changed dramatically. Far-right populism now dominates political discourse across Europe and the United States. Populist parties have taken government in Italy, and in France and the United Kingdom—long regarded as cradles of liberal democracy—far-right forces have approached governmental power [3]. Germany, which had long resisted such tendencies due to its Nazi past, has since 2023 witnessed the rapid rise of the right-wing populist AfD, now the nation’s second-largest party [28].

Earlier in this chapter, European populism was analyzed as a form of outsider politics and compared with developments in the United States and Japan, identifying three distinct patterns:

- Europe: bottom-up outsider populism → institutional penetration
- United States: bottom-up outsider mobilization → top-level takeover and insider transformation
- Japan: top-down insider populism × bottom-up outsider populism → vertical hybridization

Italian and German fascism—what Masao Maruyama called “fascism from below”—represented “authentic” forms of fascism in which mass movements overturned existing institutions [13]. While contemporary Europe has not (yet) seen full-scale fascist governments, far-right populism clearly threatens democratic erosion, and the AfD’s ascent illustrates how outsider movements can approach national power.

In the United States, the Trump movement—powered by MAGA—penetrated and ultimately seized control of the Republican Party, marginalizing its traditional mainstream. Outsider populism thus transformed internally into insider populism, placing the United States between the European and Japanese models of democratic backsliding.

The second Trump administration profoundly altered “the land of liberty.” It circumvented legal constraints, expanded presidential decree powers, used ICE to

detain and deport undocumented immigrants, suppressed political opponents, and mobilized security forces to intimidate Democratic governors. Some commentators and critics described these developments as a form of “Nazification.” Scholars of fascism fled abroad, and protests emerged against oligarchic and quasi-monarchical tendencies. Freedom of expression was curtailed through state pressure.

Although Congress and the courts continued to function—and occasionally to block administration initiatives—this uneasy coexistence of democratic institutions with authoritarian governance constituted a hybrid neo-fascist configuration. Tariff-induced inflation and the Epstein scandal eroded Trump’s approval ratings (as of November 2025), but given the contested transfer of power at the end of his first administration, many observers questioned whether a fair election would be held. California Governor Gavin Newsom even warned that Trump might attempt to block the election altogether, which would signal a serious risk of democratic breakdown in the United States.

In this respect, Hungary represents a European boundary case: a populist movement that originated as an outsider challenge has evolved into an insider-led regime, illustrating how prolonged populist governance can, under weakened institutional and supranational constraints, approach hybrid authoritarianism even within the EU framework.

Japan likewise experienced a form of top-down insider populism under Abe. Supported by nationalist currents within the ruling party, the Abe administration promoted constitutional revision and a movement toward a prewar-style authoritarian order. Although Abe’s government ended during COVID-19 and his assassination in 2022 by a victim of the Unification Church exposed deep LDP–Unification Church ties, the resulting scandals weakened the LDP and enabled a temporary democratic recovery (2024). Yet the 2025 Upper House election produced a new wave of populism and the formation of the Takaichi administration, reviving concerns about authoritarian drift.

Sanae Takaichi had previously suggested, as Minister of Internal Affairs, the possibility of suspending broadcasters that violated “political fairness”—a stance echoing Trump’s attacks on the free press. With the 2025 alignment between the LDP and Osaka Ishin, Japan now presents a hybrid model in which top-down insider populism and bottom-up outsider populism coexist and potentially reinforce one another. Japan thus displays a fusion of top-down and bottom-up populism—resembling prewar “fascism from above” and incorporating “fascism from below” [13].

While the dominant pattern in Japan is insider-led governance supported by nationalist discourse within the ruling party, it should be noted that outsider parties display heterogeneous profiles: parties such as Sanseito and the Conservative Party articulate strong nationalist appeals outside governing coalitions, whereas Nippon Ishin no Kai represents a libertarian populist configuration with limited nationalist emphasis, and the Democratic Party for the People exhibits a more moderate form of nationalism.

The most critical risk is that much as prewar Japan’s “fascism from above” absorbed bottom-up extremist pressure, contemporary insider populism may integrate outsider extremism and evolve into hybrid neo-fascism: democratic institutions persist, but authoritarian content expands. Although today’s Japan is not (yet) undergoing full-fledged authoritarian consolidation—parliament and opposition parties’ function, and elections continue—the historical analogy is significant. Prewar Japanese fascism can be interpreted through the lens of populism, and contemporary far-right populism may similarly be understood as a neo-populist phenomenon.

If vertically fused, these currents may evolve into a hybrid neo-fascism reminiscent of the prewar era. As the U.S. example shows, contemporary far-right populism

can advance authoritarianism without formally abolishing democratic institutions. Elections continue, but fairness erodes; administrative authority becomes concentrated; and media and political opponents face repression. Neo-fascism may therefore coexist with parliamentary institutions, and the survival of formal democracy does not guarantee democratic substance.

Yet “neo-” political forms do not mechanically reproduce the past. European populism may not destroy democracy, and American democracy may recover after the second Trump administration. Thus, the evolving relationship between populism, authoritarianism, and fascism demands continual and careful monitoring.

The term *hybrid fascism*, as employed in this chapter, does not denote a revival or repetition of historical fascist regimes. Nor does it imply ideological continuity with classical fascism as it emerged in interwar Europe. Rather, *hybrid fascism* is introduced as an analytical concept to capture contemporary political configurations in which selected ideological, organizational, and affective elements historically associated with fascism reappear in hybridized form within formally democratic systems.

Specifically, hybrid fascism refers to configurations in which populist mobilization, grounded in moralized people-elite antagonism and cultural or religious identity, is combined with insider-led strategies of governance that centralize authority, weaken pluralism, and erode democratic accountability, without abolishing electoral competition or constitutional frameworks. In contrast to classical fascism, these configurations do not rely on totalitarian party organization, mass paramilitarism, or explicit suspension of democratic institutions. Instead, they operate by gradually hollowing out substantive democratic norms while preserving their procedural shell.

This conceptualization is built on comparative research on populism, democratic backsliding, and hybrid authoritarianism, while extending these literatures by foregrounding the interaction between outsider mobilization and insider power. The concept of hybrid fascism thus serves as a heuristic: it highlights a distinctive pathway through which contemporary populism becomes compatible with durable institutional control, while maintaining analytical distinctions from historical fascism, competitive authoritarianism, and illiberal democracy. In this sense, hybrid fascism should be understood not as a distinct regime type, but as a historically informed subset within the broader category of hybrid authoritarianism.

To clarify the asymmetric configurations identified across regions, **Table 3** summarizes the key dimensions of hybrid populism and authoritarian risk in Europe, the United States, and Japan. This comparative overview highlights how similar structural patterns of outsider-insider relation produces divergent political consequences depending on institutional constraints and political-cultural contexts.

5.2 Religion, values, and the possibility of non-populist ethical politics

This chapter highlights three religious pathways:

- Europe: Christian identity as civilizational boundary (outsider populism)
- United States: organized evangelical mobilization + Catholic post-liberalism (outsider → insider populism)
- Japan: Shinto-inflected nationalism and quasi-religious outsider parties (vertical hybrid populism)

Dimension	Europe	United States	Japan
Primary populist locus	Outsider parties	Outsider mobilization fused with insider capture	Insider-led governance supported by outsider mobilization
Direction of populism	From below	From below → from above	From above with resonance from below
Mode of political influence	Agenda pressure on mainstream parties	Party capture and institutional penetration	Symbolic-nationalist legitimization within ruling elites
Role of religion / symbolism	Civilizational-cultural identity (limited institutionalization)	Institutionalized evangelical networks	Cultural-symbolic Shinto nationalism
Degree of political penetration	Indirect	High	Moderate (political discourse level)
Democratic implications (descriptive)	Fragmented pressure on liberal democracy	Concentrated stress on democratic institutions	Latent but rising structural tension

Table 3.
Typologies of populist mobilization across Europe, the United States, and Japan.

In European populism, we identified a religious dimension grounded in Christian identity, particularly in contexts of conflict surrounding Muslim immigration—an instance of bottom-up outsider populism [9]. In the United States, we observed the influence of Catholic post-liberalism and evangelical Christian nationalism on Trumpism, where bottom-up religious mobilization penetrated the Republican Party and reshaped it from within [7]. In Japan, nationalistic Shinto-inflected identity politics supported LDP insider populism, and more recently, new outsider populist parties with religious or quasi-religious elements have created a vertically hybrid populist configuration.

Historically, Japanese fascism was legitimized through State Shinto, rooted in the emperor system; the fusion of nationalism and religion provided ideological justification for authoritarian tendencies and a fascist drift [13]. Trump-era White Christian nationalism similarly sacralizes politics and threatens church-state separation [7]. Accordingly, when contemporary right-wing populism fuses with religion or quasi-religion, authoritarian and exclusionary tendencies tend to be strengthened.

However, religion and values do not necessarily promote populism or authoritarianism. As shown in Chapter “Japan’s 2025 Populist Turn from Outside”, declines in well-being (WB)—not merely economic hardship—strongly predict support for populist parties. Supporters of far-right populism tend to show relatively high levels of religiosity and heightened sensitivity to sacred values, but this religiosity often operates within a context of psychosocial depletion rather than flourishing.

Crucially, WB exerted stronger effects on electoral outcomes than income or economic distress. Declines in happiness, meaning, mattering/recognition, and psychosocial security are key drivers of populism. Across Europe, the United States, and Japan, the weakening of religious groups, labor unions, community organizations, and civic associations—once buffers that protected individuals from despair—has left people more vulnerable, increasing the appeal of populist movements. These findings resonate with communitarian political theory and social capital theory, which have long warned that the erosion of community bonds, trust, and civic participation would destabilize democracy.

A key implication emerges:

Populism is not primarily a product of ideology, but of psychosocial depletion, declining well-being, loss of meaning, non-recognition, and the breakdown of trust and shared values—into which exclusionary narratives can easily enter.

Within this framework, religiosity in populist movements functions as a “channel” for individuals seeking psychological security or an escape from unhappiness—but it tends to offer only an illusory form of hope.

By contrast, supporters of established centrist opposition parties—particularly the Constitutional Democratic Party—report higher well-being, stronger senses of meaning, and greater experiences of mattering and social recognition. If these parties could more effectively address declining well-being, loss of meaning, and weakened recognition and trust, they might draw citizens away from the “illusory salvation narratives” offered by populist movements and redirect political engagement toward a non-populist, ethical form of democratic politics.

Chapter “Beyond Populism” examines these normative and practical possibilities in greater depth.

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