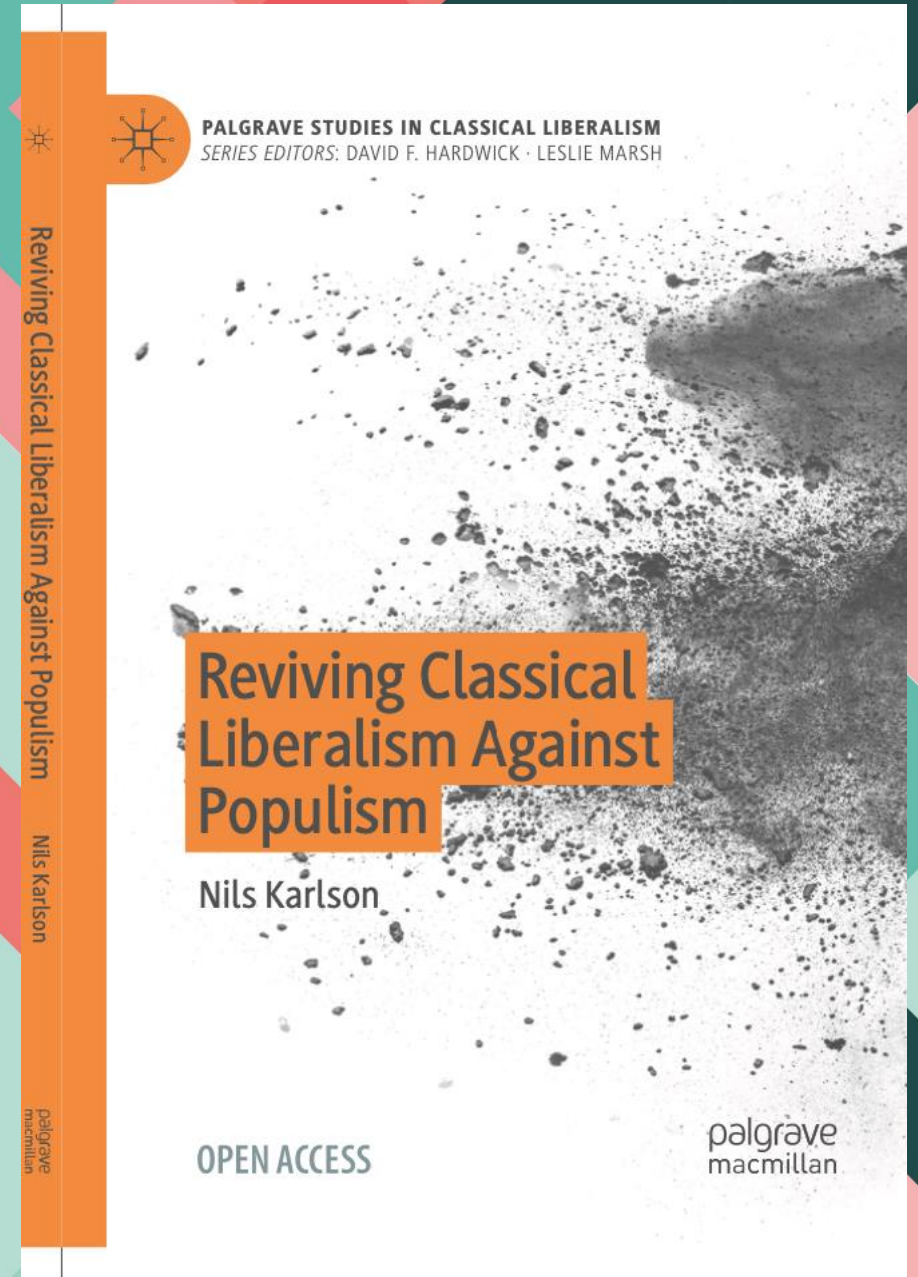


# *How to Fight Back against Populism – Left and Right*

Nils Karlson

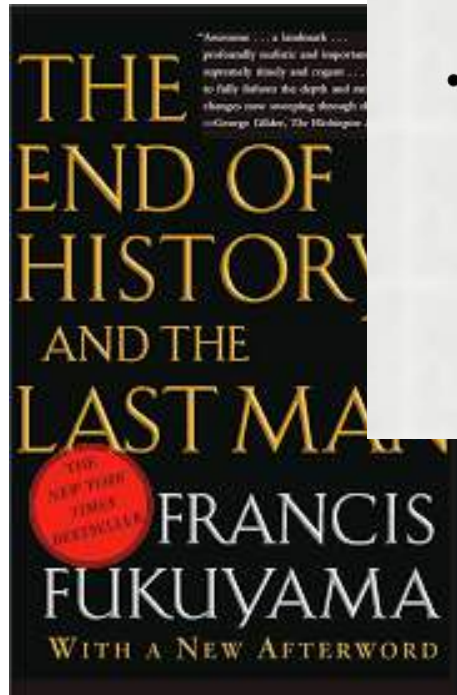
The Ratio Institute, Stockholm



# 1985 to 2010

## The End of History

- **Francis Fukuyama** - 1989
- *"What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government."*



1992



Statecraft  
and  
Liberal Reform  
in Advanced  
Democracies

Nils Karlson



RATIO



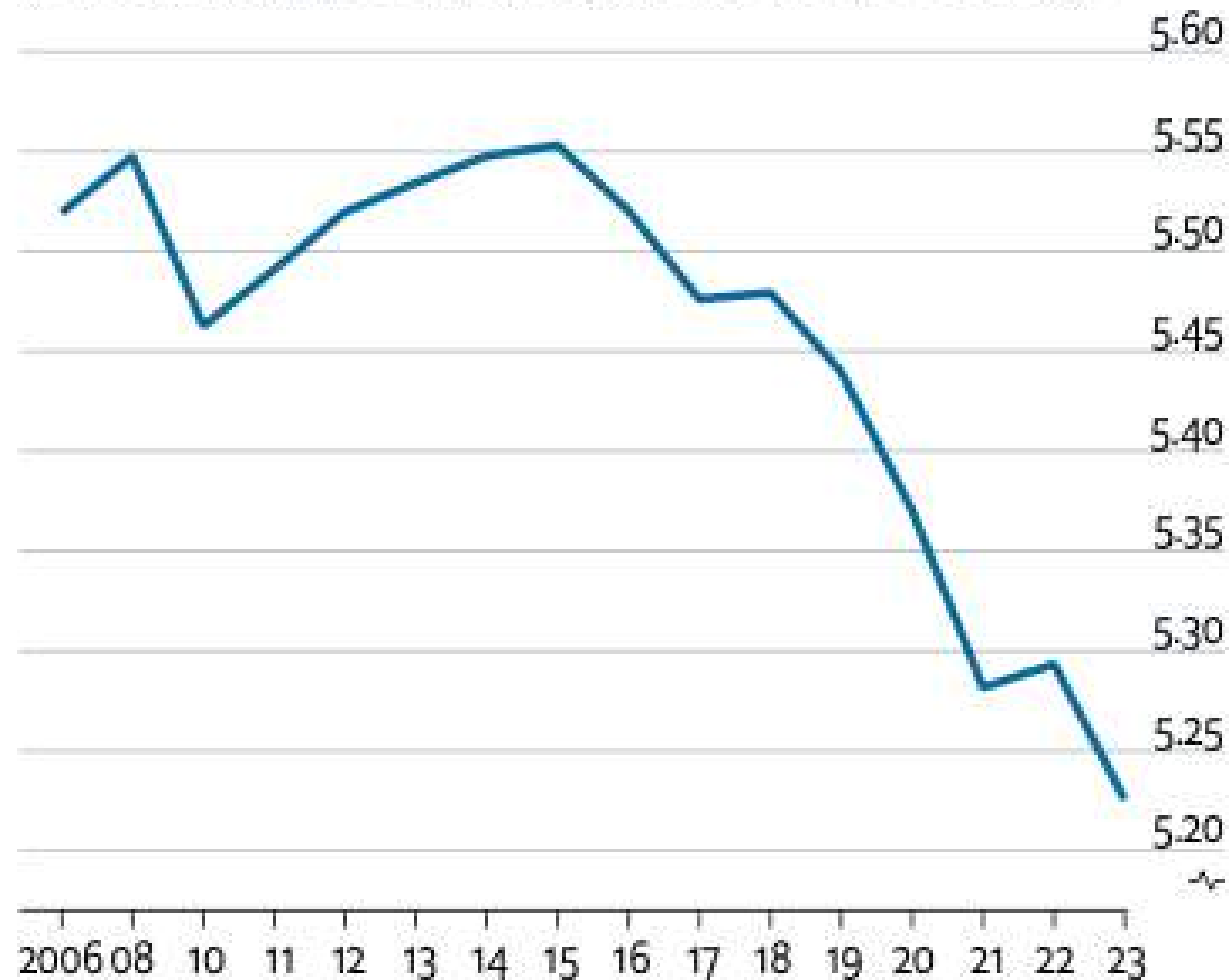
# Today...



RATIO

## Charting democracy's ups and downs, 2006 to 2023

(Global average Democracy Index score; 0-10 scale)



Source: EIU.

# Sharp Decline in Global Economic Freedom



Fraser Institute 2023

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# Populism – defining characteristics

1. Unserious and ill-founded policies
2. A rhetorical style and discourse frame
3. Autocratic institutional orientation

# 1. Unserious and ill-founded policies

**Edwards (2019) Latin American Populism, and Its Echoes around the World. JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES**

“Most populist experiments go through five distinct phases that span from euphoria to collapse. Historically, the vast majority of populist episodes end up badly; incomes of the poor and middle class tend to be lower than when the experiment was launched”



Juan Peron

**Funke et al (2023). Populist Leaders and the Economy. AMERICAN ECONOMIC REVIEW**

”We identify 51 populist presidents and prime ministers from 1900 to 2020 and show that the economic cost of populism is high. After 15 years, GDP per capita is 10 percent lower compared to a plausible nonpopulist counterfactual. Economic disintegration, decreasing macroeconomic stability, and the erosion of institutions typically go hand in hand with populist rule.”



## 2. A rhetorical style and discourse frame

1. An appeal to the "true" people, anti-establishment
2. The 'Us vs. Them' logic, deliberate polarization, trigger tribalism
3. Emotional, non-rational argumentation
4. Narratives that 'construct' the people and its different enemies
5. Attack "fake news", media, experts, courts, demonize opponents







Morales



Iglesias Turrión



Chávez

**The ‘people’**

**The ‘elite’**

**The ‘others’**

**Key themes**

## Left-wing populists

The working class, ordinary, decent people, welfare recipients, the “precariat”

Neoliberals, experts, right-wing media, right of center political parties, capitalists, IMF, World Bank

Big business, capital owners, foreign companies, actors on the global markets, US, EU

Neoliberalism, anti-capitalism, anti-globalization, discrimination, exploitation, protectionism, anti-Americanism, inequality, redistribution

## Right-wing populists

‘Native’ citizens, patriots, often rural and religious, ordinary hard-working people, taxpayers

Academics, experts, liberals, left-wing media, established parties, international organizations, EU, cosmopolitan elites

Migrants, non-natives, ethnic and religious minorities, Muslims, Jews

Nationalism, cultural identity, anti-immigration, traditionalism, religion, law and order, anti-globalization, national sovereignty, protectionism, restore welfare systems



Orbán



Le Pen



Åkesson

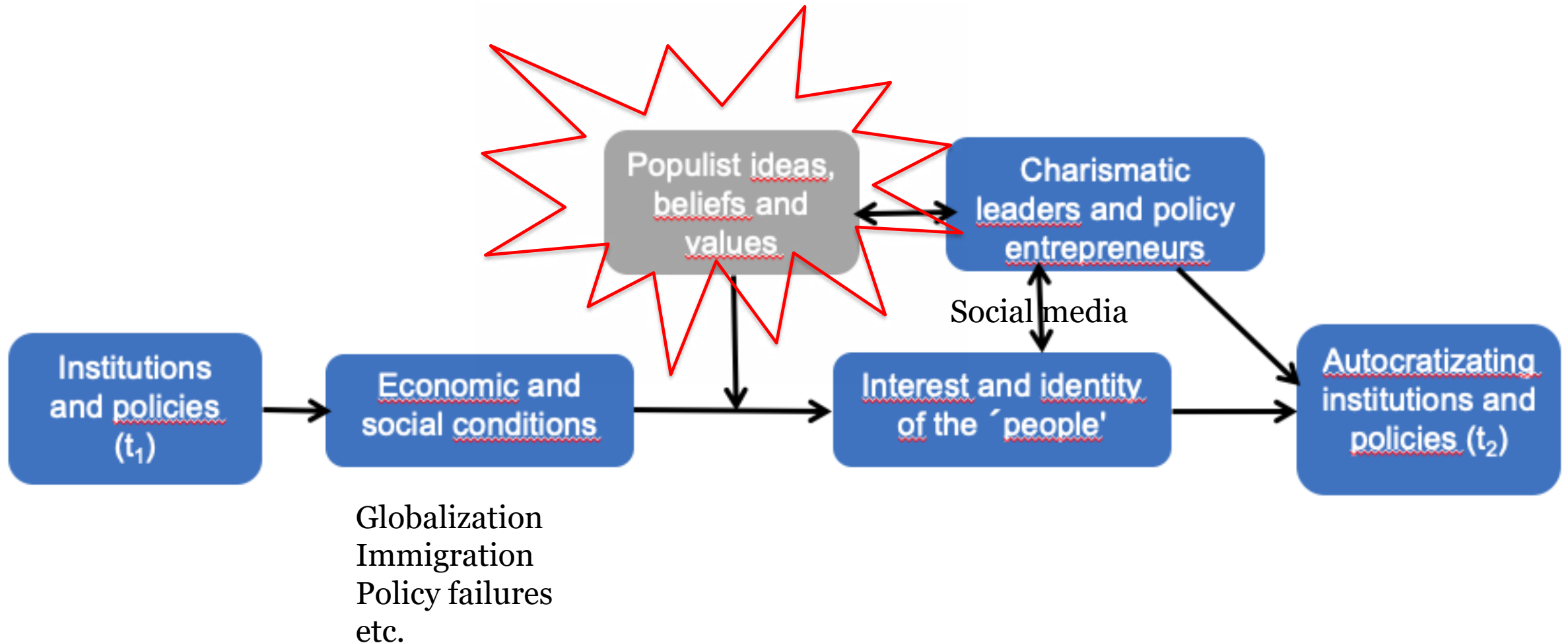
### 3. Autocratic institutional orientation

- Ultra-majoritarian, *volonté general*
- Anti-constitutional, anti-checks-and-balances, anti-pluralist
- Successive attacks on courts, electoral manipulations, limiting minority rights etc.
- An enemy from within democracy itself
- Deeply illiberal



Jean-Jacques Rousseau

# Explaining populism and autocratization



# A collectivistic identity politics

- The 'us-versus-them' logic offers a sense of belonging, to the nation, class, history, or religion
- Provides meaning and a purpose – to defend the people against allegedly corrupt elites and threatening others
- A politics of resentment and recognition





# The liberal potential

## *Three dimensions of classical liberalism*

### 1. The liberal institutions

- Limited government. constitutional democracy, the rule of law, private property rights, civil liberties, etc.

### 2. The liberal economy and society

- Market economy, civil society, voluntary cooperation, clubs, families, open society, etc.

### 3. The liberal spirit

- Rejoice in individual development and self-authorship, in entrepreneurship, in diversity and tolerance, in free speech and rational discourse in voluntary cooperation, moderation, etc.



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## Four categories of liberal strategies

1. Expose the populist strategies and their consequences
2. Defend and develop the liberal institutions
3. Embrace and promote the liberal spirit
4. Develop liberal statecraft

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**Requires the revival of classical  
liberalism itself**