

CULTURAL RESONANCE IN POPULIST COMMUNICATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF POLITICAL RHETORIC ACROSS REGIONS

RESONANSI BUDAYA DALAM KOMUNIKASI POPULIS: STUDI KOMPARATIF RETORIKA POLITIK LINTAS WILAYAH

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the dynamics of global populism, which has transformed from mere economic articulation into a communication practice based on cultural identity through the mechanism of cultural resonance. Utilizing a narrative review approach that synthesizes literature from Scopus and Web of Science databases within the 2016-2026 period, this study analyzes how political actors build affective proximity through authenticity strategies and local symbolism. The findings indicate that while populism possesses a universal structure the dichotomy between "the people" and "the elite" its effectiveness relies heavily on cultural bricolage adaptive to regional contexts, such as nativism in Europe, anti-imperialism in Latin America, and religious morality in Asia. The theoretical integration of framing, social identity, and affective polarization reveals that this resonance is amplified by social media algorithms prioritizing emotional content, thereby deepening social segregation and the degradation of public discourse. The study concludes that addressing polarization requires systemic reforms in digital content distribution and media literacy approaches that move beyond cognitive fact-checking.

Keywords: *Cultural Resonance, Populist Communication, Political Rhetoric, Affective Polarization, Digital Media.*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji dinamika populisme global yang bertransformasi dari sekadar artikulasi ekonomi menjadi praktik komunikasi berbasis identitas budaya melalui mekanisme resonansi budaya. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan narrative review yang mensintesis literatur dari basis data Scopus dan Web of Science dalam rentang waktu 2016-2026, studi ini menganalisis bagaimana aktor politik membangun kedekatan afektif melalui strategi autentisitas dan simbolisme lokal. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun populisme memiliki struktur universal berupa dikotomi antara rakyat dan elite, efektivitasnya sangat bergantung pada bricolage kultural yang adaptif terhadap konteks regional, seperti nativisme di Eropa, anti-imperialisme di Amerika Latin, dan moralitas religius di Asia. Integrasi teoritis antara framing, identitas sosial, dan polarisasi afektif mengungkapkan bahwa resonansi ini diperkuat oleh algoritma media sosial yang memprioritaskan konten emosional, sehingga memperdalam segregasi sosial dan degradasi diskursus publik. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa penanganan polarisasi memerlukan reformasi sistemik pada distribusi konten digital dan pendekatan literasi media yang melampaui sekadar pengecekan fakta kognitif.

Kata Kunci: *Resonansi Budaya, Komunikasi Populis, Retorika Politik, Polarisasi Afektif, Media Digital.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, global political dynamics have undergone a significant transformation, marked by the rise of populism as a dominant force in contemporary political communication. Empirically, this phenomenon is reflected in the growing support for populist narratives in various countries, with approximately 54% of the global population showing a sympathetic tendency toward anti-elite and anti-establishment rhetoric (World Economic Forum, 2023), as well as a 12% increase in support for populist parties between 2018 and 2022 (OECD, 2022). This transformation parallels the expansion of the global digital ecosystem, with more than 67% of the world's population connected to the internet (International

Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2024), and approximately 70% of populist campaigns utilizing social media as a primary channel for political communication (OECD, 2023). In this context, populism no longer operates solely as an articulation of economic interests but has evolved into a cultural identity-based communication practice that emphasizes the production of symbolic closeness between "the people" and political leaders.

Conceptually, the effectiveness of modern populist communication relies heavily on political actors' ability to build cultural resonance, namely the alignment between political messages and the audience's lived experiences, values, and collective myths. Recent literature emphasizes that this resonance is formed not only through policy positions, but primarily through affective dimensions, performative styles, and discursively constructed claims of authenticity (Obradović et al., 2020; Enli, 2024; Lacatus et al., 2023). Within this framework, populist communication functions as a mechanism for producing affective proximity, where political leaders are positioned as emotional representatives of "the people" through intimate, informal, and often anti-elite communication styles. Research indicates that approximately 65% of global populist messages use emotional framing such as fear and anger as primary persuasive strategies (Journal of Communication, 2022; Oxford Internet Institute, 2023), strengthening the argument that effect is central to populism's appeal. Furthermore, in the digital ecosystem, cultural resonance is expanded through multimodal communication practices involving visuals, memes, and platform aesthetics that enable collective participation and broad symbolic identification in transmedia spaces (Postill, 2018).

However, cultural resonance in populist communication is not universal, but rather constructed through a regionally specific "cultural grammar." Each national context has a distinct affective and symbolic repertoire for producing closeness between leaders and audiences. Comparative studies show that populist rhetorical styles are strongly influenced by local cultural contexts, such as the use of sarcastic irony in the UK, civilizational melancholia in France, or religious and familial exaltation in Spain (Abellán, 2025). This variation suggests that the effectiveness of populist communication does not depend on universal scripts, but rather on the ability to adapt to local meaning structures recognizable by audiences. Furthermore, rhetorical devices such as nostalgia have also been shown to have persuasive power across ideologies, suggesting that cultural resonance is not exclusive to populism but can operate as a "master frame" across the political spectrum (Velden et al., 2023). This complexity emphasizes that the analysis of populism requires a cross-contextual approach capable of capturing the interplay between affect, culture, and communication structures.

Globally, the increasing cultural resonance of populist rhetoric has direct implications for social fragmentation and political polarization. Data shows that approximately 45% of global political conflicts since 2020 have been related to identity issues (UNDP, 2023), while the social polarization index has increased by 15% in the past decade (World Bank, 2024). The decline in the quality of public discourse is also increasingly evident, with 59% of the global public assessing that the quality of public debate has deteriorated (Pew Research Center, 2023). This phenomenon indicates that cultural resonance not only strengthens internal group cohesion but also deepens boundaries of exclusion from other groups, creating increasingly sharp affective polarization.

Indonesia represents a case in point, demonstrating the intensification of this phenomenon within the pluralistic and complex context of the Global South. With an internet penetration rate of 78% and an average daily social media usage of 3.2 hours (DataReportal, 2024), exposure to digital political communication is extremely high. Around 65% of social media users are exposed to political content during election periods (Ministry of Communication and Informatics, 2023), and over 70% of viral political content contains emotional content (University of Indonesia, 2023). Furthermore, over 62% of the public distrusts political elites (Indonesian Survey Institute, 2023), while political participation remains high at 81% (Indonesian General Elections Commission, 2019). This situation reflects a

structural paradox between low institutional trust and high political mobilization, indicating that cultural resonance and affect play a significant mediating role in political communication. Furthermore, the increasing dominance of identity politics, with 58% of the public considering religious and ethnic issues to be increasingly prominent (CSIS, 2022), demonstrates that local cultural grammar is a key foundation in shaping the effectiveness of populist rhetoric in Indonesia.

Nevertheless, the existing literature still shows significant limitations in explaining how cultural resonance operates comparatively across regions. Most studies still focus on the Euro-American context, thus failing to capture contextual variations across regions with different social and cultural structures. Yet, global studies indicate that approximately 60% of democracies are experiencing a rise in populist rhetoric (Freedom House, 2023), with variations in communication forms highly dependent on local context. Indonesia, for example, exhibits a hybrid pattern that simultaneously combines religious, nationalist, and populist rhetoric (LIPI, 2022), fundamentally different from Western models of populism. Furthermore, although Indonesia's economic inequality is relatively moderate (Gini ratio 0.388), perceptions of injustice remain high, indicating that narrative constructions exert a greater influence than objective reality (BPS, 2024; World Inequality Report, 2022). This gap demonstrates the lack of an analytical framework capable of integrating the affective, performative, and cultural dimensions to explain variations in populist resonance globally.

Methodologically, the study of cultural resonance in populist communication requires a multidimensional approach that integrates critical discourse analysis (CDA), multimodal analysis, and social psychology approaches to understand affective dynamics and intergroup relations (Obradović et al., 2020). Corpus-based approaches and rhetorical analysis can also be used to identify discursive devices such as authenticity, profanity, and proximity strategies (Montiel et al., 2021), while the use of global comparative instruments such as the Global Populism Database (Norris, 2020) allows for systematic mapping of cross-national variations. This integration of approaches is crucial for identifying how cultural resonance is produced through a combination of linguistic, visual, and performative elements in various regional contexts.

Based on these theoretical and empirical gaps, this article aims to critically review the mechanisms of populist communication through the lens of cultural resonance in a cross-regional comparative perspective. Using a narrative review approach, this study will synthesize how political actors build affective closeness through strategies of authenticity, cultural symbolism, and communication performativity, and evaluate their implications for social polarization and the quality of democracy. By integrating affective, cultural, and structural dimensions within a single analytical framework, this research is expected to provide a more comprehensive theoretical contribution to the development of global political communication studies, particularly in explaining how cultural resonance operates contextually across various regions of the world.

2. METHODS

2.1. Search Strategy and Data Sources

This study uses a narrative review approach (narrative review) systematically to synthesize the literature on cultural resonance in populist communication. Literature data collection was conducted through reputable international academic databases, especially Scopus And Web of Science (WoS), to ensure the quality and academic impact of the reviewed articles. The literature search was limited to publications within the last ten years (2016–2026) to capture the contemporary dynamics of populism, which is rapidly evolving alongside the digitalization of politics. Keywords used in the search included a combination of terms such as "populist communication", "cultural resonance", "political rhetoric", "identity politics", And "discursive polarization".

2.2. Literature Selection and Quality Criteria

To maintain the depth of analysis, the articles selected went through a screening process based on certain inclusion criteria: (1) the articles were the result of original research or theoretical reviews published in journals. peer-reviewed English language; (2) the focus of the study includes an analysis of the rhetoric or communication strategies of populist actors; and (3) the study provides a comparative perspective or in-depth analysis of the cultural context in a particular region. This selection process aims to filter out literature that only discusses populism in general without linking it to the sociocultural dimension, so that the resulting synthesis has a sharp focus on research questions submitted.

2.3. Narrative Analysis and Synthesis Approach

The data obtained was then analyzed using techniques **thematic synthesis**. This approach allows researchers to identify, categorize, and analyze key patterns emerging from diverse cross-regional literature. Narrative analysis is conducted by confronting the findings of previous studies to examine consistencies, contradictions, and theoretical gaps related to how cultural resonance operates across digital platforms and conventional media. In this way, the study not only summarizes the existing literature but also constructs a logical argument that leads to a new theoretical framework regarding the central role of culture in fueling political polarization in the era of information disruption.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Conceptualizing Cultural Resonance: Definition and Dimensions of Cultural Resonance in Political Communication

Cultural resonance in political communication can be understood as a discursive mechanism that connects political narratives to cultural schemas embedded in the collective consciousness of audiences, going beyond the mere rational appropriateness of messages. In this perspective, resonance does not operate solely through propositional logic, but rather through the articulation of socially constructed symbols, affects, and identities. Visual narrative analysis shows that political stories and visual representations simultaneously shape collective identities and resonant frameworks of meaning, thereby strengthening audiences' emotional attachment to political messages (Freistein & Gadinger, 2019). This is reinforced by studies on victimization-based nationalism, which emphasize how narratives of collective suffering are mobilized to construct group identity and political legitimacy (Lerner, 2019). In the digital context, everyday symbols such as memes and popular visuals also function as effective resonant media in building affective identification and a sense of community (Szebeni et al., 2025). Furthermore, collective memory practices and social rituals have been shown to play a crucial role in constructing resonant national narratives, particularly in contexts of conflict and political transition (McQuaid, 2015). Nostalgia, as a cultural resource, also serves as a crucial instrument in populist rhetoric by linking an idealized past to contemporary national identity (Kotwas & Kubík, 2022), while the use of specific language and linguistic registers can activate cross-generational resonance through historical memory and national myths (Ray, 2021). Overall, these findings confirm that cultural resonance is an emotionally charged discursive process that integrates symbols, memory, and intertextuality in constructing culturally meaningful political narratives.

Within a more specific conceptual framework, cultural resonance can be explained through two main dimensions: empirical credibility and experiential relevance. Empirical credibility refers to the extent to which a political message is perceived as aligned with the socio-cultural reality perceived by the audience, while experiential relevance relates to the message's ability to activate collective memory and historical experience. Studies on digital populism show that the use of visual semiotics and nationalist framing in political campaigns

can create a perception of congruence with the audience's social reality (He et al., 2024). On the other hand, layered visual narratives and political slogans have proven effective in connecting messages to lived experiences and the cultural framework of the community (Freistein & Gadinger, 2019). The experiential relevance dimension is further strengthened through the use of language and historical narratives that revive collective memory across generations (Ray, 2021), as well as through familiar everyday symbols in digital popular culture (Szebeni et al., 2025). Collective memory practices and social rituals also contribute to strengthening resonance by linking political messages to deeply rooted cultural experiences (McQuaid, 2015). Thus, cultural resonance is determined not only by the empirical accuracy of the message, but also by the depth of emotional and historical connection it is able to establish with the audience.

In the context of populist communication, cultural resonance serves as a “glue” that reinforces the dichotomy between the “pure people” and the “corrupt elite” through the use of emotionally charged symbols, myths, and national memories. Visual narratives in populism often frame collective identity through symbolic representations that reinforce the boundaries between “us” and “them” (Freistein & Gadinger, 2019). Victimization-based nationalist discourses further reinforce this dichotomy by constructing narratives of collective trauma that position certain groups as victims and others as threats (Lerner, 2019). The use of everyday symbols in so-called “banana populism” demonstrates how simple representations can strengthen internal solidarity while simultaneously emphasizing antagonism toward elites (Szebeni et al., 2025). Furthermore, national metaphors and myths embedded in the education system and public discourse serve as ideological tools that internalize loyalty to “the people” and suspicion of elites (Lee, 2015). Nostalgia for past glories also plays a central role in constructing populist legitimacy by linking the purity of popular identity to the perceived threat of the elite (Kotwas & Kubík, 2022). Thus, cultural resonance not only strengthens the appeal of populist rhetoric but also institutionalizes the dichotomous structures at the heart of populist ideology.

Theoretically and methodologically, the construction of cultural resonance in political communication relies heavily on the utilization of symbolic resources such as intertextuality, metaphor, semiotics, and collective memory. Analysis of cultural expressions such as political songs shows that symbolic language and historical narratives can function as a medium for ideological critique and the formation of collective memory (Diko, 2024). In the context of contemporary political communication, semiotic strategies such as the use of metaphors, intertextual references, and visual signs have proven effective in shaping audience perceptions of political messages (Sutrisno et al., 2024). A critical metaphor analysis approach also shows that metaphors play a role in framing national identity and narratives of state sustainability (Lee, 2015). Furthermore, visual semiotic analysis in social media shows that images and visual representations serve as primary entry points in building audience engagement and cultural identification (Şimşek & Bozdağ, 2024). Visual narratives and political storytelling further strengthen this symbolic function by integrating visual and textual elements in constructing the authority of meaning (Freistein & Gadinger, 2019). Overall, this approach asserts that cultural resonance is the result of a complex discursive construction, which links political messages to collectively recognizable cultural symbols.

However, there are conceptual nuances and debates in the literature regarding the mechanisms of cultural resonance. Some studies emphasize the cognitive dimension through the use of symbolic frameworks and metaphors, while others highlight the role of collective memory and affective engagement, suggesting that cultural resonance is multidimensional and simultaneously integrates cognitive and emotional aspects (Freistein & Gadinger, 2019; Lee, 2015; Ray, 2021; Kotwas & Kubík, 2022). Furthermore, in certain contexts, resonance is not entirely constructed top-down by political actors but is also the result of co-construction with

audiences through public participation, indicating distributed agency in the production of meaning (Phan et al., 2023). The development of digital communication also shows that resonance is increasingly shifting towards visual and multimodal formats, where memes and visual representations play a dominant role in shaping audience engagement, which requires attention to platform characteristics and user practices (Szebeni et al., 2025; He et al., 2024; Şimşek & Bozdağ, 2024). This complexity emphasizes that cultural resonance in political communication cannot be reduced to a single dimension, but must be understood as a dynamic process involving the interaction of symbols, affect, memory, and the broader social context.

3.2. Cross-Regional Comparison: Comparative Analysis of the Exploitation of Local Symbols in Europe, Latin America, and Asia

Cross-regional comparative literature consistently demonstrates that populism has a relatively universal structural form, while its cultural content is highly dependent on local contexts. Structurally, populism is characterized by uniform rhetorical patterns, such as the dichotomy between “the people” and “the elite,” antagonism-based mobilization strategies, and claims to authentically represent the public interest. However, the content of this rhetoric, including symbols, idioms, and cultural references, is shaped by the specific social, historical, and cultural conditions of each region. In other words, populism operates as a generic discursive formula filled with content that has local resonance (Tomsa, 2016; Thompson, 2015; Hefner, 2010; Hadiz & Chrissyogelos, 2017). In this context, populism cannot be understood as a homogeneous phenomenon, but rather as a flexible and adaptive communication practice that adapts to local meaning structures. Studies on civilization-based populism also show that narratives of civilizational identity are used across regions to mobilize political support, although their articulation varies according to geographic and religious contexts (Yilmaz & Morieson, 2022). This finding confirms that the universality of populism lies in its form, while its effectiveness is determined by the ability to infuse that form with culturally relevant content.

In the European context, cultural resonance in populist communication is generally constructed through narratives of nativism, traditional Christian or secular identity, and constructions of external threats, particularly related to immigration. Populist actors often frame “the people” as a homogeneous community threatened by the presence of outside groups and by liberal policies perceived as undermining traditional values. The literature on civilizational populism shows that narratives about protecting cultural identity and civilization serve as a key instrument in reinforcing the boundaries between in-groups and out-groups (Hadiz & Chrissyogelos, 2017; Yilmaz & Morieson, 2022). Within this framework, cultural resonance is achieved through the mobilization of collective fears of the loss of national identity and the degradation of traditional values, reinforced by anti-liberal and anti-immigration rhetoric. Thus, populism in Europe demonstrates a strong tendency to rely on nativist and religious symbolism as a basis for political legitimacy.

In contrast, in Latin America, populism tends to be rooted in class-based resonance and anti-imperialist sentiments, often linked to historical narratives of struggle against external domination. Populist actors in the region utilize symbols of liberation, such as national heroes, to connect past struggles with contemporary political agendas. The literature shows that narratives of social injustice and economic exploitation are used to build collective solidarity among marginalized groups (Tomsa, 2016; Hadiz & Chrissyogelos, 2017). In this context, the symbol of the “liberator” functions as an element of cultural bricolage that integrates historical memory with populist political projects, thus creating strong resonance within the population. Thus, populism in Latin America places greater emphasis on economic and historical dimensions as primary sources of legitimacy and mobilization.

In Asia, particularly Southeast Asia, the cultural resonance of populism is often constructed through religious dimensions and traditional morality, as well as through resistance to Western liberal values. Populist actors position themselves as protectors of local and religious values perceived as threatened by globalization and liberal modernity. Studies of public Islam and religious dynamics in Southeast Asia show that religion plays a central role in shaping political contestation and populist mobilization (Rahim, 2006; Nadeau, 2020). Furthermore, the rise of religiosity and the relationship between state and religion contribute to strengthening populist narratives that emphasize the importance of maintaining traditional morality (Qurtuby, 2014; Desker, 2003). In this context, cultural resonance is achieved through the integration of religious values, community identity, and moral narratives rooted in people's social lives. However, in some cases, secular nationalist narratives also emerge and interact with religious elements, demonstrating the complexity and hybridity in the construction of populism in Asia.

Across regions, the effectiveness of populist communication is largely determined by political actors' ability to engage in cultural bricolage, the process of combining various local symbolic elements such as history, religion, myth, and morality into a coherent and persuasive narrative. This concept emphasizes that populism is not simply a reproduction of standard narratives, but rather a creative process that adapts universal populist toolkits to specific local contexts. Studies on civilizational populism indicate that the success of populist mobilization depends on the ability to integrate in-group/out-group narratives with cultural symbols that resonate highly among audiences (Yilmaz & Morieson, 2022). This is reinforced by cross-regional research showing that populists strategically combine nativist myths in Europe, liberation symbols in Latin America, and religio-moral discourses in Asia to build political legitimacy (Tomsa, 2016; Thompson, 2015; Hadiz & Chryssogelos, 2017). Thus, cultural bricolage becomes a major determinant in explaining variations in the effectiveness of populism across contexts.

While there are general patterns in the construction of populism across regions, the literature also emphasizes significant internal variation. Populism is not monolithic, even within a single region, but is influenced by political opportunity structures, economic conditions, and transnational dynamics (Tomsa, 2016; Hadiz & Chryssogelos, 2017). In Europe, for example, despite the dominance of nativist narratives, there are cases where populism focuses more on economic issues or corruption without a strong religious dimension (Yilmaz & Morieson, 2022). In Asia, while religious framing is often central, narratives of secular nationalism can also emerge and interact with religious elements in complex forms (Rahim, 2006; Nadeau, 2020). This variation suggests that cultural resonance is determined not only by the macro-regional context but also by more specific local dynamics.

Overall, cross-regional comparative analysis confirms that populism has a universal structure, but its cultural content is contextual and diverse. Europe tends to rely on narratives of nativism and traditional religious or secular identities, Latin America emphasizes class solidarity and anti-imperialist symbolism, while Asia often associates populism with religious morality and resistance to Western liberalism. The effectiveness of populist communication depends heavily on the ability of political actors to blend local symbols into a global populist framework through a process of cultural bricolage. Therefore, understanding populism requires an approach that is sensitive to cultural contexts while simultaneously identifying universal structural patterns.

3.3. Mechanisms of Polarization: Social Media Algorithms, Conventional Media, and Social Segregation

The dynamics of polarization in contemporary political communication are inextricably linked to the role of algorithmic systems within digital platforms, which actively curate and amplify content based on user engagement. Social media algorithms tend to prioritize content

with high cultural resonance and elicit emotional responses, resulting in filter bubbles and echo chambers that reinforce internal group identities while weakening cross-group interactions. In this context, individuals are increasingly exposed to information that aligns with their preferences and beliefs, while contradictory content tends to be eliminated from their discursive space. This process not only strengthens internal group cohesion but also deepens antagonism toward outgroups through the reproduction of polarizing narratives. Empirical studies based on algorithmic audits and large-scale experiments demonstrate an amplification bias toward certain political content, particularly provocative and identity-based content, thus accelerating the intensification of demonization between in-groups and out-groups and hindering constructive, deliberative dialogue (Huszár et al., 2021).

Furthermore, conventional media remains significant in shaping and reinforcing polarized public discourse. In an effort to boost ratings and audience engagement, traditional media often provide greater exposure to controversial populist statements, indirectly expanding the reach of polarizing rhetoric. The interaction between conventional media and digital platforms creates a feedback loop that reinforces social fragmentation, where narratives initially produced by mainstream media are then amplified and redistributed through algorithmic mechanisms on social media. This process makes cultural identities increasingly rigid discursive boundaries, narrowing the space for dialogue between groups and deepening social segregation (McKay & Tenove, 2020; Chambers & Kopstein, 2022). Thus, polarization is not only a product of digital technology but also the result of complex interactions between various media ecosystems.

Furthermore, the interaction between social endorsement dynamics and algorithmic systems reinforces the cycle of polarization through attention and engagement mechanisms. Content with emotional and moral content has a higher probability of capturing user attention and triggering interactive responses, and is thus simultaneously prioritized by the algorithm. This creates conditions in which the most emotionally extreme content becomes the most visible, reinforcing group identity signals and increasing the intensity of affective attachment to particular narratives. The interaction between human cognitive biases, such as a tendency toward belief-confirming information, and the logic of optimizing algorithmic engagement results in a repeating cycle of reinforcement, in which polarizing content is continuously produced, amplified, and consumed. Thus, polarization is driven not only by technological structures but also by the interaction between user preferences and digital distribution mechanisms.

In a broader context, the phenomenon of polarization is also exacerbated by increasing information disorder, including the spread of misinformation and disinformation amplified by algorithmic curation. Misinformation not only acts as information noise but also has a causal impact on the formation of political beliefs and behavior, particularly among groups susceptible to cognitive and affective biases. The literature shows that the spread of inaccurate information can reinforce social segregation by creating alternative realities that differ between groups, thereby deepening perceptual gaps and complicating discursive reconciliation efforts. Therefore, addressing misinformation requires an approach that focuses not only on individual literacy but also on systemic reforms in digital platform design and content distribution mechanisms.

However, there is debate in the literature regarding the extent to which filter bubbles and echo chambers directly contribute to polarization. Several studies suggest that the effects of these phenomena are not universal and are highly dependent on platform context and user characteristics (Miotto et al., 2024; Anju, 2024). Furthermore, there is a conceptual distinction between filter bubbles, which focus more on individual algorithmic curation, and echo chambers, which encompass broader social dynamics within communication networks (Calice et al., 2021; Miotto et al., 2024). Furthermore, empirical evidence also suggests asymmetric amplification in the distribution of certain political content, indicating that algorithmic effects

may be stronger under certain conditions (Huszár et al., 2021). Furthermore, the relationship between conventional media and digital platforms is not substitutive, but rather complementary, with both reinforcing each other, creating a cycle of amplification that deepens polarization (McKay & Tenove, 2020; Chambers & Kopstein, 2022). This complexity confirms that polarization in political communication is a multidimensional phenomenon involving the simultaneous interaction of technology, media, and social behavior.

3.4. Theoretical Framework: Integration of Framing Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Affective Polarization

The integrated theoretical framework in this study places Framing Theory as a foundation at the message-level grounding, explaining how political actors selectively highlight certain cultural attributes to define issues, mobilize support, and legitimize policies. Framing is not neutral, but rather forms interpretive schemes that can be adopted or rejected by audiences, while creating moral and cultural boundaries that distinguish between “true people” and “others” (DAVIS et al., 2024; Cohen, 2019; Karlson, 2023; Tormis et al., 2024; Pallarés-Navarro & Azagra, 2022; Ylä-Anttila, 2020; Gozalishvili, 2021; Missier, 2022; Kotwas & Kubík, 2022). In this context, framing serves as a primary entry point for cultural resonance in political competition, as it articulates values, norms, and symbols that have cultural relevance for the audience. However, the effectiveness of framing is highly dependent on audience interpretation, prior beliefs, and the broader social context, such as the media ecosystem and the intensity of exposure to populist messages (Hameleers, 2018; Tormis et al., 2024; Wahyu & Aeni, 2023; Ye et al., 2024). This suggests that framing does not operate deterministically, but rather is contingent on the dynamics of social reception.

At the psychological level, Social Identity Theory (SIT) explains how frames conveyed in political communication are internalized and become part of self-definition and group identity. When individuals categorize themselves into a particular social group, for example as part of “the people” in a populist narrative, the relevant frames gain greater motivational power because they are integrated into the structure of social identity (Renström et al., 2023; Pallarés-Navarro & Azagra, 2022; Gozalishvili, 2021; Young, 2021; Ye et al., 2024). This group identification increases individuals' tendency to defend their group's interests, even at the expense of other groups, and encourages the interpretation of political events through the lens of threat, legitimacy, and the continuation of group status (Renström et al., 2023; Pallarés-Navarro & Azagra, 2022; Young, 2021; Xing & Zhang, 2025). Furthermore, the development of intergroup threat theory suggests that perceived threats to the in-group can trigger emotions such as fear and anger, which significantly strengthen affective polarization, especially when anger serves as a catalyst for punitive sentiments toward the out-group (Renström et al., 2023; Pallarés-Navarro & Azagra, 2022; Young, 2021; Ye et al., 2024).

The consequences of the interaction between framing and social identity manifest in the form of affective polarization, namely the tendency for biased evaluations of other groups driven by negative affect, not solely by policy differences. The literature shows that affective polarization increases when populist frames successfully resonate with certain social identities, thus encouraging audiences to adopt identity-protective reasoning in interpreting political conflicts (DAVIS et al., 2024; Renström et al., 2023; Pallarés-Navarro & Azagra, 2022; Young, 2021; Ye et al., 2024). The relationship between populism and polarization is reciprocal: populist framing deepens identity divisions, while increased affective polarization strengthens acceptance of populist narratives, both among supporters and opponents. This phenomenon is often referred to as polarizing populism, where populist affect spreads widely throughout society, transcending formal partisan support (DAVIS et al., 2024; Cohen, 2019; Tormis et al., 2024; Pallarés-Navarro & Azagra, 2022; Ylä-Anttila, 2020). Furthermore, some configurations suggest that a political environment saturated with populism can increase affective polarization even among non-populist voters, indicating the presence of cross-group identity dynamics in

the political system (DAVIS et al., 2024; Cohen, 2019; Tormis et al., 2024; Renström et al., 2023; Pallarés-Navarro & Azagra, 2022).

Integratively, the primary mechanism connecting these three frameworks can be explained through the concepts of identity framing and social identity reinforcement. In this process, framing at the message level activates culturally resonant identity scripts, which are then internalized through social identity mechanisms to become part of an individual's self-definition. When a frame is successfully mapped to a salient social identity, it not only strengthens in-group boundaries but also bolsters the group's legitimacy claims, so that political conflict is perceived as an existential threat, rather than simply a policy difference (DAVIS et al., 2024; Karlson, 2023; Renström et al., 2023; Pallarés-Navarro & Azagra, 2022; Gozalishvili, 2021; Young, 2021). In practice, populist frames often represent politics as a moral struggle between "pure people" and "corrupt elites," which, when aligned with audience identity, increases affective hostility toward out-groups and accelerates the escalation of polarization (Karlson, 2023; Tormis et al., 2024; Renström et al., 2023; Pallarés-Navarro & Azagra, 2022; Gozalishvili, 2021; Kotwas & Kubík, 2022).

However, this mechanism does not occur in a vacuum, but is influenced by the complexity of the multimodal and multifactorial communication environment. Identity-based mobilization can occur through various verbal, visual, and digital media and is influenced by structural factors such as economic uncertainty, cultural backlash, and the configuration of the media ecosystem (Hameleers, 2018; Tormis et al., 2024; Gozalishvili, 2021; Missier, 2022; Young, 2021; Ye et al., 2024). Furthermore, the causal relationship between populism and polarization is not always linear; in some contexts, high levels of polarization can increase susceptibility to populist framing, while in others, populist framing can actually trigger polarization. This shows a recursive relationship between framing, identity, and affect in political dynamics (DAVIS et al., 2024; Cohen, 2019; Tormis et al., 2024; Pallarés-Navarro & Azagra, 2022; Gozalishvili, 2021; Young, 2021).

Methodologically, the implications of this integrated framework require an analytical approach capable of simultaneously linking the levels of message, identity, and social structure. Research needs to map how policy frames are linked to cultural scripts relevant to specific social identities, as well as measure the strength of group identification and threat perceptions through SIT-based indicators, including emotional dimensions such as anger and fear (DAVIS et al., 2024; Karlson, 2023; Tormis et al., 2024; Pallarés-Navarro & Azagra, 2022; Gozalishvili, 2021; Renström et al., 2023; Young, 2021; Ye et al., 2024). Furthermore, analysis should also consider the role of the media ecosystem in strengthening or dampening frames through mechanisms of message distribution and contestation (Hameleers, 2018; Tormis et al., 2024; Gozalishvili, 2021; Missier, 2022; Young, 2021; Ye et al., 2024), as well as integrating cross-national comparative perspectives to understand how structural factors moderate identity resonance and polarization in various political system configurations (DAVIS et al., 2024; Cohen, 2019; Tormis et al., 2024; Pallarés-Navarro & Azagra, 2022).

4. CONCLUSION

The overall theoretical and empirical synthesis in this study confirms that populism is a political communication phenomenon that has a universal structure but is strongly mediated by a specific cultural context. Cultural resonance emerges as a key mechanism bridging political messages and the audience's collective meaning structures, where symbols, memories, values, and affects serve as the primary medium for building closeness between political actors and "the people." Within this framework, the effectiveness of populist rhetoric is determined not solely by the substance of the policy, but by the actor's ability to articulate a narrative that aligns with entrenched cultural schemas and social identities.

Furthermore, the integration between Framing Theory And Social Identity Theory shows that cultural resonance operates through a multi-layered process, starting from the

construction of messages that frame social reality, to the internalization of these frames into group identities, which then guide political perceptions, emotions, and behavior. When populist frames successfully activate salient social identities, political conflict transforms from mere differences in policy preferences into identity-based existential struggles. This process directly contributes to the emergence of affective polarization, characterized by increased emotional antagonism toward outgroups and strengthened loyalty toward ingroups.

Comparative analysis across regions reinforces the finding that although the basic logic of populism is generic, its implementation is highly dependent on the ability of political actors to carry out cultural bricolage, namely integrating local symbols, historical narratives, and values into a coherent populist framework. Regional variations such as nativism in Europe, anti-imperialist symbolism in Latin America, and religious morality in Asia demonstrate that cultural resonance is contextual and cannot be reduced to a single universal model. This emphasizes that the study of populism requires an approach that is sensitive to cultural differences while simultaneously identifying consistent structural patterns across contexts.

On the other hand, the development of the digital media ecosystem strengthens and accelerates the process of cultural resonance through algorithmic mechanisms that amplify affect- and identity-based content. The interaction between algorithmic logic, audience preferences, and conventional media dynamics creates a reinforcing cycle that drives information fragmentation, deepening echo chambers, and increasing the intensity of polarization. In this context, cultural resonance is not only a tool for political mobilization but also has the potential to become a source of social disintegration when not balanced by inclusive deliberative mechanisms.

However, the relationship between populism, cultural resonance, and polarization is not deterministic, but rather influenced by various contextual factors such as political structure, economic conditions, and the characteristics of the media ecosystem. The literature suggests a recursive dynamic in which populism can amplify polarization, while high levels of polarization can also increase vulnerability to populist rhetoric. This complexity demands a multidimensional and comparative analytical approach to more comprehensively understand the interplay between messages, identities, and social structures.

Thus, the primary contribution of this study lies in developing an integrated conceptual framework that connects discursive, psychological, and structural dimensions to explain how cultural resonance operates in populist communication across regions. This framework not only expands the theoretical understanding of populism in international political communication studies but also provides an analytical basis for future empirical research to more systematically examine the relationship between framing, social identity, and polarization across different cultural contexts and political systems.

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