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To cite this article: Marianna Griffini & Oscar Mazzoleni (12 May 2026): Produce and reproduce! Understanding multidimensionality in contemporary radical right populist ideology, Journal of Political Ideologies, DOI: [10.1080/13569317.2026.2671673](https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2026.2671673)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2026.2671673>



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Published online: 12 May 2026.



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Produce and reproduce! Understanding multidimensionality in contemporary radical right populist ideology

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ABSTRACT

Radical right populism represents a multidimensional and transforming ideology. This contribution tackles the complexity of radical right populism by drawing a theoretical framework based upon two related concepts: producerism and reproducerism. While the first is a well-known notion in the literature on populism, the second is introduced here as a complementary concept that involves reproductive politics, including natality and the family. This paper aims to highlight the theoretical advantage afforded by the related concepts of producerism and reproducerism, first by connecting the economic, cultural, and demographic dimensions of radical right populism. Then, it will illustrate their usefulness in capturing the contextually sensitive configurations of producerism and reproducerism enacted by current political and social actors in Europe and the United States.

Introduction

Despite its various uses to understand trends in contemporary democracies, radical right populism is far from being an uncontroversial concept. This is not surprising, as the two main components of this concept, i.e. radical right and populism, are characterized by multiple definitions. Populism has been conceived, often alternatively, as a style, a strategy, or an ideological phenomenon.¹ Radical right can also take different meanings. Teun Van Dijk argues that the radical right is not defined on the basis of a unique ideology but on a configuration of ideologies.² Andrej Zaslove pointed out that new right-wing parties ‘do not adhere to a single foundational doctrine, political philosopher or intellectual tradition.’³ The complexity is also inherent to the relation between radical right and populism. The two concepts are distinctive. Populism is not all radical-right-oriented; the radical right is not invariably populist; and not all kinds of populism are radical.⁴ However, populism and the radical right are partially overlapping concepts sharing some characteristics that the term ‘radical right populism’ encapsulates, such as a nativist vision of ‘good’ people under threat by established powers.⁵

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Beyond this common ground, the literature on radical right populism has tried to deal with the diversity of the concept and its transformation in contemporary democratic politics. Three strands are particularly relevant here. First, several scholars have privileged the analysis of the cultural dimension of the radical right, by focusing on nationalism, xenophobia, racism, and authoritarianism, while underestimating the economic dimension of the phenomenon. In this context, Carter stressed that ‘the traditional left-right economic divide is a rather unhelpful tool for categorizing [radical right parties], given their rather mixed position on economic issues and the fact that they most often treat economics as a secondary concern.’⁶

A second strand of literature, instead, calls for the necessity not to overlook the economic dimensions of radical right populism. For instance, Otjes et al. argued that radical right populist parties ‘have developed a distinctive economic policy which is primarily derived from their core ideology, and which is independent from traditional left-right economic issues.’⁷ Other scholars highlighted that the socio-economic stances of these parties are diversified, responding to heterogeneous constituencies, and range from welfare retrenchment and deregulation,⁸ to welfare chauvinism.⁹ This body of literature underscores the importance of considering socio-economic policy orientations, urging scholars to adopt a more comprehensive understanding of the radical right, whose ideology straddles culture and economics.¹⁰

A third and emergent strand of literature calls for the consideration of the demographic dimension of contemporary populism understood as an ideology or a discourse. Traditionally, the literature on populism has rarely analyzed the tripartite relationship between economic, cultural, and demographic issues, which include reproduction, gender, sexuality, and family issues. More recently, radical right populism in Western democracies has been connected with the rise of new political leader and parties, but also social actors, like social movements, characterized by discursive and policy attacks against reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and the so-called ‘gender ideology,’ in the name of religious and traditional values.¹¹

While recognizing that these cultural, economic and demographic dimensions correspond to separate academic disciplines and their subfields, we argue that it is time to develop a conceptual framework that integrates them and captures the multidimensional and evolving configurations of radical right populism, by addressing and linking its economic, cultural, and demographic dimensions. In dealing with this challenge, the paper will show the heuristic advantage to stress and connect two key concepts – producerism and reproducerism – which can bridge the three above-mentioned dimensions shaping contemporary radical right populist ideology. In line with a recent body of literature, the notion of producerism can help to connect cultural and economic components of radical right populism, resonating with Müller’s argument that considers producerism both an economic and moral aspect.¹² At the same time, we contend producerism has to be linked to a new concept, *reproducerism*, aiming to capture the demographic dimensions of the radical right populist ideology in relation with its economic and cultural aspects.

Inspired by Freedén’s morphological approach, we argue that ideologies are ‘combinations of political concepts . . . organized in a particular way,’ and, as such, neither static nor necessarily consistent.¹³ Thus, despite lacking the consistency of a classic political philosophy related to the main political ideologies of the XX Century, radical right

populism might be seen as an ideology that links together a ‘conception of human nature, a particular conception of social structure, of justice, of liberty, of authority.’¹⁴ With regard to radical right populist ideology, this contribution focuses on two of its components rooted in the populist ideological legacy, i.e. producerism and reproducerism, and highlights their ideal-typical relationship and their contextual expressions from a constitutive morphological perspective.¹⁵

The paper is organized as follows. First, we introduce the concept of producerism, considering its genealogy and different uses; then, we underscore its limits and suggest articulating it jointly with the concept of reproducerism, aiming to understand the transformation of contemporary populism, and more particularly radical right-wing populism. Then, we explore differences and analogies between the two concepts, and we sketch two ideal-typical relations between producerism and reproducerism in radical right populism. After illustrating our perspective from a theoretical point of view, we will apply it to examples of political and social actors in Europe and the U.S, in order to show its heuristic utility.

Producers and parasites

Our starting point is producerism, which is a concept bridging the separation between the ‘economic’ and the ‘cultural’ dimensions of populism. Producerism is ‘an ethic, a moral conviction’¹⁶ over the socio-economic order. It can be defined as a moral belief that pits those who produce prosperity against those who threaten it. Although it is difficult to translate the term into some Continental European languages – for instance in German, French or Italian- the opposition between the ‘producers’ and the ‘parasites’ belongs to a heterogeneous intellectual tradition, across both the radical left-wing and radical right-wing spectrum. For instance, one might find the concept of producerism in Abbé Sieyès’s opposition between aristocracy and Third estate, and later in Pierre Joseph Proudhon’s writings.¹⁷ Later, the notion of producerism became crucial to understanding the shift to the right of French and Italian socialists – from Sorel to Mussolini – between the end of the XIX Century and the beginning of the XX Century, when producerism was articulated in tandem with nationalism and antisemitism. Historian Sternhell saw producerist ideology – that in the English translation of French books is spelt ‘productionist’ – as one of the key components of the origins of fascism at the beginning of the XX Century.¹⁸ Against liberalism and socialism, national-socialism derived its economic ideas from a legacy molded by revolutionary syndicalism. The producers were seen as an alternative to both the liberal ‘abstract individualism’ and the socialist ‘proletariat.’¹⁹

In the genealogy of the concept, the opposing social groups embodying the producers and the parasites are not univocally understood.²⁰ However, in a broader sense, producerism may be defined as a socio-economic moral component of the radical right populist ideology that emphasizes the importance of the production of goods and services, and the role of producers (e.g. workers, farmers, small business owners) against parasites, which are presented as undeserving aliens threatening common prosperity. According to Sternhell, the class or category of producers could ‘include all participants in the productive process workers, technicians, administrators, managers, directors, and even capitalist industrialists.’²¹ The producers were undoubtedly an economic group, but in order to exist they needed certain moral attributes that placed them on a higher ethical

level.²² Based on a ‘pure morality and a classical culture, the producers’ civilization could escape democratic mediocrity and prevent the world from sinking into decadence.’²³

Although producerism is also compatible with left-wing populism (e.g. when producers are positioned against financial capital),²⁴ the close link between radical right populism and producerism in the history of the U.S.²⁵ and in its contemporary versions has been increasingly stressed.²⁶ According to Finchelstein, ‘producerism is a key component of the populist understanding of the people.’²⁷ Producerism can be understood as a heuristic category able to capture the populist opposition between the ‘people’ and their ‘enemies’ within the economic sphere. The concept leverages the distinction between ‘form’ and ‘content,’ a key aspect of Laclau’s theory of the ‘empty signifier,’ as it gives a specific meaning to the ‘people’ and its ‘opponents.’²⁸ The defense of the interest of the ‘people’ might variably mean sovereign empowerment, the protection of the people’s will, but also the people’s material prosperity. Focusing on the economic dimension of populism through a cultural lens, producerism becomes a way in which the broader populist phenomenon manifests itself. Thus, this perspective enriches our understanding of populism as a complex concept, capable of adopting various content while maintaining a consistent form.²⁹

In regard to contemporary radical right populism in U.S and Western Europe, according to Ivaldi and Mazzoleni,³⁰ producerism articulates a set of ideas that translate into socio-economic populism understood as a Manichean discourse opposing people and their enemies through three main propositions: (1) the producers correspond to the ‘true people’ who contribute to economic prosperity; (2) ‘parasites’ are the corrupted elites, immigrants and other undeserving people; (3) it is necessary to restore the centrality and recognition of the people. While the left identifies the producers as the workers opposed to capitalism and particularly to financial power, the right identifies producers as both workers and small entrepreneurs opposed to undeserving immigrants and global elites.³¹

The prosperity of the people and the gender issue

The pivot of producerism is prosperity and deservingness. In a populist perspective this means the prosperity of the people and mainly their material wealth. And in a radical-right connotation, prosperity refers to the interest of the nation. And the nation is gendered and molded by traditional values. While radical right populism attempts to argue for an ‘universal’ opposition between the producers and the parasites that is not explicitly gender-based, it is easy to identify a gender dimension in the producerist morality: producers are often associated with the man breadwinner model.³² As Sternhell suggests, producers ‘share virile, heroic, pessimistic, and puritanical attitudes based on a sense of duty and sacrifice.’³³ What is crucial in the genealogy of the notion of producerism, both in the U.S. and Europe, is its direct link with patriarchal values and war semantics. The producer is often represented as a man, a virtuous warrior, a soldier ready for sacrifice, evoking the republican model based on individual responsibility toward the prosperity of the community.³⁴

Sternhell’s definition of producers, emphasizing their virility and combativeness hinges upon the traditional gender division between men and women.³⁵ This suggests an implicit connection between producerism, conservative pro-natalist

ideology, and anti-gender emphasis of the radical right populism in the Americas and Europe. Yet, as noted above, the concept of producerism has the merit of bridging cultural and economic dimensions of radical right populism but fails to analytically capture the demographic component related to social reproduction. In fact, producerism does not consider demographic prosperity as an ideological goal, where the wealth of the people and of the nation is contingent upon demographic reproduction, protecting the people and the nation against demographic threats to future economic prosperity.

That is why we construct a two-pronged theoretical framework that joins producerism with a new and complementary concept aiming to capture the demographic dimension of radical right populism: *reproducerism*. As a moral notion, reproducerism emphasizes the antagonism between the ‘good’ and deserving women, i.e. the reproductive ones, and their ‘enemies,’ who embody a threat to the demographic future of the people and of the nation. In contemporary radical right populism, reproducers are the pillars of the Christian heteronormative family, while anti-reproductive threats are, for instance, Muslim immigrants, leftist feminists, homosexuals, the so-called ‘gender ideology,’ abortion policies, declining birth rates, and LGBTQ+ rights. Like producerism, reproducerism does not unequivocally identify who belongs to each of the dichotomous groups based on their reproductive capacity. In the reproducerist logic, the distinct economic and social features of men and women are predicated upon the cultural understanding of rigid binary biological distinctions between the sexes. This ‘naturalizes heteronormative couplings and reifies the related hierarchy between men and women.’³⁶

Thus, producerism and reproducerism have strong affinities: 1) both are moral notions, sharing an antagonistic vision of society viewing the ‘people’ as victims of their ‘enemies’; 2) both center on the ‘people’ and classify ‘enemies’ based on their failure to contribute to common economic and demographic prosperity; 3) both share the goal of ensuring the strength and survival of the nation. Moreover, producerism and reproducerism aim to redeem the people from perceived decadence through effort and sacrifice in order to restore the people’s prosperity. Producerism and reproducerism are thus two sides of the same coin. The former tends to emphasize socio-economic prosperity, while the latter focuses more on demographic prosperity. Both notions contain an instrumental dimension based upon a moralistic claim. In fact, each individual is responsible to the people and must sacrifice themselves for the people’s future and to honor their past.

When aligned with radical right populist ideology, the joint articulation of producerism and reproducerism resonates with two main scholarly trends studying the prosperity of the nation. First, it aligns with the scholarly trend interpreting radical right populism as ‘nostalgia’ for the ‘the good old days.’³⁷ Second, it connects with the scholarly trend³⁸ stimulated by Farris’s³⁹ seminal work on ‘femotionalism,’ critiquing the instrumental use of gender equality to serve nationalist (and xenophobic) aims. In the following sections we propose two ideal types of the nexus producerism-reproducerism, which we will then apply to real-world examples of political actors, like political parties, but also social actors who do not have electoral goals.

Reproducerist producerism and mixing re-producerism

Radical right populism simultaneously espouses and unsettles a binary gender and sex distinction, as it subordinates women to these distinctions by virtue of their reproductive duty, while sometimes assigning to them an economic role as producers. The advantage of jointly articulating producerism with reproducerism lies not only in linking traditionally separate bodies of literature, but also in underscoring the connections between these two concepts and their ideological background, i.e. neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism.⁴⁰ These linkages underscore the complex relationship between producerism and reproducerism, which we address through the construction of two predominant ideal types of the producerism/ reproducerism nexus in contemporary radical right populism.

The first type, which we label *reproducerist producerism*, corresponds to a conservative separation between producers and reproducers: the former are exclusively men, while the latter are solely women, i.e. mothers, who are strictly considered based on their biological reproductive function. In this model, women are not included within the producer category, as they are not seen as directly contributing to national economic prosperity. Indeed, in this ideal-type, women are subordinated to men from a social, cultural, moral, and economic point of view, through a patriarchal perspective. Women are, thus, confined to an apparently secondary role, although they perform an essential function, i.e. reproduction, to ensure the replication of national prosperity from a demographic point of view.

The second type, which we label *mixing re-producerism*, presents varying degrees of overlap between producerism and reproducerism. It assumes that women share a producerist role with men, and, at same time, they hold a more or less dominant reproducerist role, although they should not be just mothers. The variation of this ideal type depends on the relevance and the relations of the neo-liberal and neo-conservative components at stake.⁴¹ These ideological components tend to underline personal responsibility, self-reliance and a reduced role of government in economic affairs, with lower taxes, and the promotion of entrepreneurial solutions. Moreover, they conceive the welfare state as synonymous with dependency and inefficiency (especially neo-liberalism) or as excessively focusing on community and family-based support systems (especially neo-conservatism). Neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism convey a strong moralism about how 'good' people should be or what they should do, according to market rationality and traditional values.⁴²

However, in respect to gender issues, neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism provide different orientations, as the former tends to 'co-opt' feminist claims and the latter develops an 'anti-gender' discourse.⁴³ From this observation we derive our argument that anti-gender reproducerist producerism has a more neo-conservative tone, while mixing re-producerism tends to be influenced more markedly by neo-liberalism. Despite these nuances, the presence of women as mothers dedicated, to different degrees, to the heteronormative family and to procreation remains a constant.

Dealing with diversity

Using the afore-mentioned ideal types for the articulation of producerism and reproducerism, it is possible to reinterpret ambivalences in contemporary radical right populism. Scholarship⁴⁴ stresses the duplicity of radical right populist strategies toward women's rights, including the call for more substantial recognition of the role of women in the economic sphere.⁴⁵ Radical right populism, indeed, might fight for women's rights, but the notion of women is often restricted to mothers, which leads to opposition to abortion, childless women, and the so-called 'gender ideology.'⁴⁶ A similar ambivalence marks the radical right populist stance on LGBTQ+ rights, complicated by the less prevalent but present phenomenon of homonationalism.⁴⁷

Against the background of ambivalence, multidimensionality, and complexity, our framework, based upon the articulation of producerism and reproducerism, stresses the various combinations of neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideologies. At the same time, the ways in social and political actors combine producerism and reproducerism in their radical right discourses depend also on different contexts and the opportunities. Aiming to illustrate the explanatory powers of our innovative framework, we will discuss some specific examples of political and social actors.

Reproducerist producerism

In less secularized Central and Eastern European countries, one might find two well-known examples of *reproducerist producerism* in party-based radical right populism. The Polish radical right Law and Justice party (PiS), founded in 2001 and currently led by Mateusz Morawiecki, is deeply shaped by this type of ideological articulation of producerism and reproducerism, which is conjugated with nationalism, Catholicism, and authoritarianism.⁴⁸ PiS exemplifies the backlash against cultural changes surrounding women's self-determination, against which it counterposes a pro-natalist ideology, anchored in the heteronormative family as the primary nucleus of society.⁴⁹ Tellingly, the PiS manifestos from 2015 and 2019 describe the family as 'a lasting relationship between a woman and a man.'⁵⁰ The heteronormative 'traditional' family is tasked with the mission of guaranteeing the genealogical reproduction of the family lineage, and therefore, of the nation, the continuation of Catholic traditionalist beliefs, and the reproductive defense against the fear of demographic change caused by immigration.⁵¹

PiS's traditional view of the family and of women as stripped of self-determination and womanhood aside from motherhood are 'imbued by a nostalgically reactionary vision of the family,'⁵² harking back to a distant and idealized past before the advent of postwar communism. Social policies aiding families and encouraging fertility and procreation, as highlighted in the 2011 manifesto, include increased social benefits for families and support for pregnant women.⁵³ PiS staunchly fights against women's role as producers employed in the paid workforce. A clear example is the 2011 proposal for pensions for women who gave up their jobs to dedicate themselves completely to their families.⁵⁴ This understanding of women seems at odds with PiS's choice to have the 2015 single-party majority government led by a female prime minister.

A similar model of reproducerist producerism features in Orbán's Hungary. Orbán spearheads the populist radical right party Fidesz. The latter, which has enjoyed

considerable stints in government, is embedded in a composite humus of economic neo-liberalism mixed with a predominant social conservatism. Men are the main breadwinners and the pivots of heteronormative families in Fidesz's radical right populism, which rejects non-traditional and non-conservative views of gender.⁵⁵ Heteronormativity, like in Poland, is steeped in nationalism: the people the party claims to speak to and for are heterosexual members of the 'native' population, who form nuclear families. Consequently, the heteronormative family is key to national identity.

The entanglement of conservatism and nationalism with reproducerist producerism forms two characteristic socio-economic policies advocated by Fidesz. First, welfare chauvinism, i.e. the policy that holds that social benefits should be reserved for the 'deserving' native population, while they should be limited or withdrawn for non-natives.⁵⁶ Deservingness, within the broader context of producerism, becomes racialized, as the non-natives, including immigrants, are understood as belonging to the non-producerist class of parasites.⁵⁷ Second, the separation between 'producers' and 'parasites,' i.e. individuals contributing to the nation's wealth vis-à-vis those, like non-natives, supposedly draining national wealth by abusing the system and receiving benefits without making contributions.

Beyond political actors, a significant variation of the reproducerist producerism type is represented by the movement of the so-called tradwives in the United States.⁵⁸ The tradwives trend has gained popularity since 2020, when its magnitude was fueled by the stay-at-home lifestyle resulting from the COVID-19 restrictions on mobility.⁵⁹ Some tradwives are linked to Republicans, some are affiliated with the multifaceted galaxy of the so-called alt-right, some do not put forward a distinct affiliation, but they promote values aligned with Republicans. At a minimum, tradwives are stay-at-home mothers who frame themselves as utterly dependent on and subservient to their husbands, and as busy with childbearing, child rearing, and home-making. On TikTok and Instagram, #tradwives present aesthetically feminized and comforting visuals for public online consumption of nativist and pro-natalist content espousing biblical views of womanhood, where women were secondary to men and totally devoted to the domestic sphere.⁶⁰

The family that is visually protagonist of #tradwives' content is strictly the heterosexual one with several children, as prescribed by religion and by the social conservatism religion is interlocked with. This results in strict heteronormativity and nostalgia for a distant and idealized past anchored in rigidly binary gender roles, without reference to reproductive rights or to women's rights of self-affirmation outside the domestic sphere. Concomitantly, it is important to notice that, beyond the surface of what they desire to portray to their social media audiences, tradwives are also working mothers, *stricto sensu*, since they run individually lucrative businesses as digital content creators.⁶¹ The primary purpose of their digital content is to show the empowering nature of motherhood, and the apparent self-realization of women purely within the domestic sphere as mothers and devoted wives (unlike the tradie-wives case that will be discussed below). Closer scrutiny of the phenomenon of tradwives reveals their concealed producerist role, which is a consequence of tradwives' ambivalent use of social media torn between authenticity and shoppable life.⁶² Following up from our typology of the relationship between producerism and reproducerism, we define the tradwives movement as a kind of reproducerist producerism, where producerism remains the apparent domain of men, while women's

role as producers is only implicit, carried out digitally, and contingent upon women's reproducerist function.

Mixing re-producerism

In Western European countries, characterized by secularization and the long-standing integration of women in the labor market, radical right populism tends to be a type of *mixing re-producerism* with a clearer linkage with neo-liberal feminism.⁶³ This is, for instance, the case of Fratelli d'Italia (FdI), i.e. Brothers of Italy. Since FdI's foundation in 2012, the traditional family has been the linchpin of the party's ideology, along with the nation and religion. The centrality of the heterosexual family in the construction of the nation is unmistakable in FdI's imagery. Their 2022 general election manifesto⁶⁴ opens the section related to family policies with a quote from Pope John Paul II: 'The family is the founding element of society and what makes a 'Nation truly sovereign and spiritually strong.'⁶⁵

In her maiden parliamentary speech in 2022, Giorgia Meloni, leader of FdI and the first Italian female Prime Minister, insisted that the family is 'the primary nucleus of our societies, the cradle of affections, and the place where the identity of every one of us is formed.' A telling indicator of the paramount importance of the family in FdI is Meloni's decision to rename the Ministry for *Equal Opportunity* as the Ministry for *Family, Birth and Equal Opportunities*. This change underscores the party's social conservatism, which emphasizes the traditional heteronormative family and the association of women primarily with motherhood.⁶⁶ Consequently, this emphasis carries the explicit or implicit marginalization of childless or same-sex families and the impetus to resist multicultural influences.

In fact, the heteronormative family is tasked not only with a demographic and socio-cultural function, but also with an economic and a nationalist one attempting to counter multiculturalism. Therefore, the family in FdI has a triple function: to replenish the fraying demographic prowess of the nation, to reverse the dwindling birth rates of natives, and to supply future labor force for the nation.⁶⁷ With regards to the latter point, Meloni does not only foreground the woman's role in producing the future generations of workers, but also the woman's producerist role. Indeed, she takes on the mission to increase the rates of female employment,⁶⁸ which reflects her combination of the social conservative vision of women as reproducers with more neo-liberal understandings of women as working producers.

Arguably, what contributed to earning Meloni a critical margin of voters at the 2022 elections is her ambivalent appeal both to highly traditionalist social conservative voters and to neo-liberal feminist ones, attracted by the Prime Minister's promise to help women in juggling employment with parenting. For instance, the FdI 2022 manifesto proposed to break the glass ceiling that prevents women's affirmation in the workplace, to contrast the gender pay gap, and every form of discrimination, gender stereotypes, and violence against women.⁶⁹

Looking beyond the surface of programmatic declarations, though, it becomes clear that Meloni, as prime minister, has invested more energy in policies in favor of families and mothers rather than in favor of working women.⁷⁰ Hence, the producer role of women, therefore, remains quite shallowly constructed and weakly developed. This

clumsy balancing act between producerism and reproducerism, which sees the latter take the priority, is a prime example of the populist radical right's ambivalence toward women's roles. Meloni's persona is crystallized in both motherhood (reproducer) *and* womanhood (producer). It is a case in point that in the widely cited 2019 speech in favor of the traditional family, Meloni emphatically introduced herself with the following words: 'I am Giorgia, I am a *woman*, I am a *mother*.'⁷¹

The mixing re-producerism type is not limited to political parties and leaders. This kind of ideological proposal is also driven by underlying movements of opinion. For this point of view, in the U.S. radical right populist rhetoric, family firms are increasingly becoming the symbol of 'family-based, private, unincorporated capitalism.'⁷² This is not surprising, given Trump's pivot of his discourse around small business owners, forming a 'coalition of makers,' who are worthy hardworking people.⁷³ In the run-up to the 2016 and 2020 elections and, once again in the run-up to the 2024 elections, Trump pledges to represent the interests of small business, and proposes policies to respond to their resentment against bureaucratic regulations and federal interventions.⁷⁴ The protection of family firms, incidentally, is also not dissonant with the Tea Party economic credo against the 'deep state.' The Tea Party-associated Club for Growth maintained that 'corporations are not popular with voters. Americans tend to think that corporations are faceless and greedy behemoths.'⁷⁵

In the family firm, the producerism anchored in the centrality of the 'small' merchants and craftsmen converges with reproducerism, since the professional partnership is also a romantic one. The convergence of producerism and reproducerism stresses the economic function of the traditional family where gender hierarchies are confirmed, although men and women have in theory the same leading business role. Hence, based on labor hierarchies replicating traditional gender hierarchies, the family firm recasts the role of working women involved in paid self-employment as reproducers and as aspirational business owners. The family firm reflects what Nancy Fraser⁷⁶ calls neo-liberalism's progressive and reactionary modes. Progressive neo-liberalism, underpinning the emancipatory entry of women into the professional sphere, is combined with and overshadowed by reactionary neo-liberalism, which is grounded in privatization and displacement of economic responsibility onto individual families.⁷⁷

Conclusion

From an analytical point of view, this article embraces the multidimensionality of the radical right populist ideology. Despite recognizing a plurality of discourses and agendas provided by political and social actors, scholars usually adhere to their traditional subdisciplinary academic divides. Instead, we reorient the analysis of the radical right populist ideology toward an interdisciplinary focus that trespasses traditional parochial boundaries. In doing so, we argue for the necessity to connect moral, socio-economic and demographic dimensions of radical right populism.

In pursuing this goal, we put at the center the concepts of producerism and reproducerism. These concepts are both distinct and interrelated. The concept of producerism, which belongs to a heterogeneous but rich intellectual legacy, stresses the opposition between the people contributing to the prosperity and parasites in the socio-economic sphere. The new concept of reproducerism focuses on the

biological reproduction of the people. At the same time, both are expressions of the Manichean moral separation between the ‘good people’ and their ‘bad’ opposites. Intertwined in radical right ideology, producers and reproducers together establish that the ‘good’ people can compete for and express traditional values, and, simultaneously, contribute to the socio-economic prosperity and demographic reproduction of the nation. Along with nativism, nationalism and authoritarianism,⁷⁸ producerism and reproducerism allow us to understand the intricacies and adaptability of radical right populism, which is one of the most significant ideologies promoted by political actors in contemporary democracies.

According to our framework, the ideal typical articulations assumed by producerism and reproducerism in radical right populist ideology depend on the varied and sometimes overlapping influences of neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism. At the same time, its expressions in political and social actors’ discourse depend on the contextual constraints and opportunities in which these actors operate. In the neo-conservative hue of radical right populism, the woman is the reproducer, as she becomes assimilated to the mother of the traditional heterosexual family, i.e. the pivot of society and of the nation, as the cases of the PiS, Fidesz, and tradwives illustrate. In a more predominantly neo-liberal view, instead, the woman is still the reproducer, but is also a producer, i.e. a worker contributing to the national prosperity,⁷⁹ as the cases of Fratelli d’Italia, a party led by single mother Giorgia Meloni, and of the movement defending the family-business in U.S. show.

Regardless of its ambivalent use by social and political actors, the new concept of reproducerism allows us to capture the rising relevance of gender and family issues in contemporary radical right populism, with women represented as biological producers of future generations (hence, reproducers), with the clear mission to replenish the dwindling ranks of the national population. Reproducerism underscores the sole and crucial role of women as guarantors of the continuity of the human species broadly and of the nation more specifically. The reproductive role of women is localized in the context of the nuclear heteronormative family, which, in radical right populism, is built around the marriage between two individuals of opposite sexes committed to childrearing, and is the only entity capable of biological reproduction, and of ensuring ‘daily and generational production.’⁸⁰

In a complementary way, producerism entrusts women with the goal of nurturing future generations of producers, through performing unpaid care work that ignores women’s essential contributions in the economy. By virtue of their Manichean ideological underpinnings, the concepts of producerism and reproducerism within contemporary radical right populism integrate an explicitly antagonistic logic, which targets those who interrogate and unsettle the nexus between gender and reproductive capacity. According to this logic, the targeted enemies are, to variable degrees, Muslim immigrants, anti-abortion movements, gender ideologies, and LGBTQ+ people, who are seen as threats to the demographic power of the nation.

To address the constellations of variations of the nexus we theorized here, further in-depth comparative empirical studies are needed. Such studies should focus not only on the U.S, Western and Central-Eastern Europe, but also on other regions including Latin America, where radical right populism is ever more present.

Notes

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Acknowledgement

Previous versions of this article have been presented at various academic meetings, including at the 16th ESA General Conference in Porto from 27 to 30 August 2024 and the 75th PSA Annual Conference in Birmingham from 14 to 16 April 2025. We are grateful for all the feedback received in those meetings and the improving suggestions made by the four anonymous reviewers of JPI.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).