Over the last decade, populist movements, parties and politicians have risen to new levels of influence in politics and the wider public sphere. This special issue aims to address the social challenges of populism for business, particularly in terms of its impacts on the range of corporate social responsibility issues and initiatives that this movement has come to increasingly contest.

Whilst there are many debates on the nature of populism, its different historical forms and its variation across different national contexts (see Kaltwasser et al. 2017), most theorists emphasize the way in which such movements are premised on the idea that societies are divided between 'the people' and 'the elite' (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Muller 2017). Populism claims to speak on behalf of 'the people' and against 'the elites', who are seen as corrupt, manipulative and exploitative, controlling the state, the courts, the media and finance for their own benefit. Populist movements tend to arise where there are highly visible and growing levels of social polarization and income inequality in a society. They claim that these inequalities are reinforced by cultural and value divides between a wealthy powerful elite controlling key institutions in its own interests and the mass of the people, left behind economically, undermined culturally and reduced to relative powerlessness in the political sphere. Populist leaders present themselves as the embodiment and the conduit for the demands of the people to overturn this state of affairs and return to a more homogeneous society where values, language and culture are widely shared, government more accountable to the people and economic processes controlled for the benefit of the country rather than global capital (Canovan 2005; Weale 2019).

Most populist parties and movements are therefore linked to nationalism, defined by exclusion and/or marginalization of outsiders (on grounds such as ethnicity, race, caste or religion). Such exclusions may involve certain categories of people already present in the country or potential immigrants seeking access. Similarly foreign firms and foreign governments may become targets of populists if they are seen as potentially having the power to undermine the economic, military and cyber security of the country. When in power, populist politicians are impatient with intermediary institutions that constrain their ability to get things done and get their message across.

In the current period, instead of relying on the mainstream media, many populist movements have been quick to use social media outlets as ways to 'speak directly' to the people and to amplify their voice through the use of targeting and bots. Social media platforms have until

recently allowed all sorts of opinions masquerading as 'news' and 'facts' to spread indiscriminately across the internet. This has raised the question of new responsibilities for business in the digital age (Flyverbom et al., 2019) as efforts to force them off such platforms has led populists to respond by raising issues of free speech and the power of platforms and their owners.

Populist movements also frequently attack independent judiciaries and authorities that insist on subjecting their actions to the rule of law, labelling them as 'enemies of the people'. They are similarly skeptical about scientific and expert knowledge and prone to accept and circulate conspiracy theories (Castanho Silva et al., 2017; Bergmann, 2018). e.g. on the COVID pandemic (Eberl et al., 2020: Gugushivili et al., 2018) and on global climate change (Lockwood, 2018).

Consequently, populist leaders in power may contribute to anti-democratic backsliding and a shift towards authoritarianism (Sallai and Schnyder, 2020), affecting countries across most continents and even long-standing democracies such as the US or the UK (Fukuyama, 2020). Societies with strong populist movements or populists in government are becoming increasingly fractious and divided - as left - and right-wing forces clash over fundamental values and social and economic policies - creating a new context for business, civil society organisations and states.

On social issues, populist leaders often attack migrant communities as deviant or inherently criminal particularly if such communities are Muslim or from areas of the world suffering high levels of crime, poverty and lawlessness. Populism is frequently misogynistic, nostalgically looking to reduce women's reproductive rights and return women to the home and family. Religion in the form of evangelical Christianity (mostly in Europe, the US and Brazil) or Hindu nationalism (in India) provides a form of moral and ethical frame for this.

Hence, populist movements and parties threaten the liberal consensus in which business practices regarding diversity and inclusion, immigration, the natural environment, CSR, and broad social issues became institutionalised. Over the last decade many large businesses gradually attempted to align with what they perceived as the growing social consensus on the need for businesses to act responsibly. Businesses have therefore developed corporate social responsibility programs across a wide range of internal and external activities. Many of these have been based on the scientific understandings of sustainability and climate change and the role which business has in these processes. Businesses have also gradually sought to develop internal policies that promote gender equality and diversity in the workplace, including acting against sexual harassment, supporting the presence of LGBTQ employees, recruiting from ethnically diverse populations. Businesses have signed up to various agreements to improve work conditions and to avoid human rights breaches in global supply chains. They have shifted research and innovation into areas that will reduce carbon emissions, create cleaner air quality and improve quality of life by developing new products to support the emergence of new and diverse lifestyles. Many have signed up to the UN Global Compact which reflects a commitment to international agreements based on the historical liberal democratic values of the UN including a free press and media, an independent judiciary, free and fair election processes. Many of these practices and agreements are challenged by populist movements as we have described them.

What does this mean for business? To what extent have business leaders challenged populist discourses, adapted to them in limited ways, or committed to populist ideas and leaders? If populist leaders and governments no longer trust the science on climate change, no longer

embrace diversity, no longer cooperate in international arenas to improve regulation and rules over global supply chains, then how does this change traditional practices and beliefs? These questions require us to better understand and explore the role of corporations in capitalist societies (de Bakker et al., 2020) and how current forms of capitalism mediate the rise of populist leaders (Devinney and Hartwell, 2020).

In this special issue, we welcome contributions on the broad implications of populism on the interface of business and society in shaping a range of corporate social responsibility issues and initiatives that this movement has come to increasingly challenge. More specific themes of interest are in relation to implications on Diversity and Inclusion, Race and Immigration, Anti-science Attitudes and Beliefs, Climate Change and Big Tech.

Listed below are some questions to illustrate possible topics around those dimensions. These questions are not exhaustive or comprehensive, and we welcome other lines of investigation that address the nexus between the rise of global populism and business and society. We particularly welcome submissions that address the topic from a comparative perspective, and we invite contributions from all parts of the world spanning the Global South and Global North.

Populism and implications to the interface of Business and Society
- How does the rise of populism influence ideas about business, society and their interdependence?
- To what extent has the rise of populism given rise to new business and society phenomena over time and across locations?
- What are the social consequences for business related to the rise of populism?
- What is the interaction between business and other societal actors, such as social movements in supporting pro- and/or anti-populist causes/movements?
- How are the CSR activities of businesses affected by populist political pressures?
- Could the rise of populism lead to a redefinition of CSR and make the concept broader/narrower?
- How does this new context shape the strategies of civil society organisations and social movements (from right and left camps) towards business?

Diversity and inclusion
- To what extent has the rise of populism affected HRM practices or business commitments to diversity, such as gender quotas or initiatives to enhance female and minority representation or ethnic/racial diversity on company boards?
- How are businesses that declared their support of feminist movements and campaigns reacting to the populist discourse?

Race and immigration
- To what extent have businesses embraced or resisted populist social agendas, in particular regarding race and immigration, and which factors have shaped such responses?
- How are businesses that rely on an international workforce reacting to the hostile environment for immigration?
- How are businesses that have been promoting racial equality addressing the populist challenge?

Anti-science attitudes and beliefs
- How has the populist approach to the COVID-19 pandemic impacted businesses?
- How has business reacted to the noisy anti-vaccination movement?
- How are companies that have actively defended science and evidence-based policies responded to the populist challenge?

Climate Change
- How has the rise of populism affected the environmental agenda and its associated governance regimes?
- How has business reacted to the rise of populist leaders that discredited climate change?
- How have businesses that develop products and services related to climate change (e.g. renewable energy, and carbon markets and offsetting industries) been affected by the rising of populism? How have they reacted?

Big tech
- What are the normative implications of these developments for understanding the social responsibility of business – should firms defend democracy, free speech, the integrity of courts, or the fairness and transparency of the electoral process?
- What is the role of big tech - such as Facebook and Twitter - in relation to populism, 'fake news' and exclusionary and inflammatory political ideologies?
- What is the role of social media platforms in protecting as well as regulating 'free speech'? What should be regulated, how and by whom?

Submission Process
- The deadline for submissions is **January 31, 2022**.
- All manuscripts must be uploaded to Scholar One Manuscripts (https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bas) between January 1 and January 31, 2022.
- Be sure to specify in the cover letter that the manuscript is for the special issue on "Social Challenges for Business in the Age of Populism".
- The Business & Society author guidelines (https://journals.sagepub.com/authorinstructions/BAS) must be followed.
- All submissions will be double-blind peer-reviewed by multiple reviewers.
- For questions about the content of the special issue, please contact any of the guest editors.

About the journal
Business & Society is one of the leading, peer-reviewed outlets for scholarly work dealing with the intersection of business and society. The journal publishes research that develops, tests, and refines theory, and it enhances our understanding of important societal issues and their relation to business. Business & Society's current two-year impact factor is 7.3, ranked 29 out of 153 journals in the business category. For further details on the journal, see http://bas.sagepub.com.

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