

Research Report | XXVII Annual Session

General Assembly 4 - Special political and Decolonisation

Addressing the global rise of populism



MODEL UNITED NATIONS
THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF THE HAGUE

Sabrina Ciauri
Tessa ter Avest

Forum:	General Assembly 4 - Special political and decolonisation
Issue:	Addressing the global rise of populism
Student Officer:	Tessa ter Avest
Position:	Deputy Chair

Introduction

In recent presidential elections, populist candidates have received a lot of support from the general population. This makes it an issue worth addressing. Those who debate on this issue should know that ‘to address’ does not necessarily mean ‘to suppress’, but rather, how to approach this issue? Is the global rise of populism a problem? Why or why not? Should the global rise of populism be seen as an indicator for other societal situations? If that is the case, how can we ensure those societal situations are harmless and how should we figure out how to resolve them?

To discuss this issue, one should have a clear view on what populism actually means, by definition as well as how the term is (mis)used. Populism is often seen as a threat to democracy and international cooperation, which in the globalizing world would seem as a problem, however, there is need for clarification on this term. According to Benjamin Moffitt, author of *The Global Rise of Populism*, populism means to represent the unified will of the people. He says the term is often misused, especially in the European context. Recently, in Europe, the populist label has been used on many occasions. Situations such as Brexit in



Britain, the new government in Italy, political incidents in Germany concerning the migration policies and more are examples of so called populist movements. In the case of Brexit, the populist label may suit some but not all voters who voted in favor of Brexit.

Definition of Key Terms

Populism

Is to represent the unified will of the people. It is a political ideology that assumes a separation of 'the people' and 'the (corrupt) elite' in society.

Nativism

The policy of protecting the interests of native-born or established inhabitants against those of immigrants.

Majoritarianism

Proclaims that a majority (formed by for example language, class or religion) of the population has the right to a certain preferential treatment . It also says they have the right to make decisions that affect the whole society.

Demagogue or rabble-rouser

A demagogue or rabble-rouser is a leader in a democracy who gains popularity by exploiting prejudice and ignorance among the common people, whipping up the passions of the crowd and shutting down reasoned deliberation.

Nationalism

An ideology where the interests of a particular nation are prioritized over individual or other nations. It ignites a strong patriotic feeling that is also combined with a feeling of superiority over other nations.

General Overview

The term populism

The term populism is very often misused and therefore incorrectly seen as a bad ideology. Mostly, when there is a well-argued criticism on populism it is not really about the thought of populism, instead, well justified criticism bases its arguments on populism being an ideology which divides society into “the people” and the “corrupt elite”. During most populist movements, the current government is not believed to rule in accordance to the people's desires and needs. As both BBC journalist Lionel Shriver and Human Rights Watch executive director, Kenneth Roth, implied: populism is linked to nativism, xenophobia, racism, and Islamophobia. Islamophobia meaning irrational fear, aversion of and discrimination against Islam or those who practice Islam. In populism usually characterised in simple irrational thoughts or phrases like *“Most terrorist are muslims ergo Islam is wrong”* (which is completely unsubstantiated). Its link with populism (and other biases of populism) is often emphasised and exaggerated by opponents of populism as well as sometimes by the media.

What is the actual problem?

This makes it a challenging issue to discuss. Is populism a bad truly a bad ideology? Perhaps the ideology itself is not a problem, but instead the ideas and feelings that trigger a



spike in populism is the problem at hand. As Kenneth Roth stated, it is hard for people to identify with those who differ from themselves. Not identifying with for example, refugees, makes it is easier to violate their rights to someone's own advantage. This goes the other way around too, not identifying with another human beings makes it harder to ensure their rights to your own disadvantage or mere discomfort.

Root causes of populism are mostly those that cause “the people” discomfort or discontent; economic stagnation, feelings of unsafety, and more. We can see that during earlier outbreaks of migration and economic crisis, populism has grown. According to Ruth Wodak, an expert on populism from Lancaster University, different kinds of populism (left- and right-wing) have grown, and have been caused by disparate events. Examples of those events are explicitly named in the Timeline of Key Events.

- Right-wing populism is often caused by migration. This started after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989. It tends to nativism and nationalism.
- Left-wing populism answers primarily to poverty and that is why its origins mainly come from economic crises. It focuses on capitalism and globalisation.

Today, rightwing populism is more popular and successful than its leftwing cousin. However this leftwing populism can still be found in parties in Spain (Podemos), Greece (Syriza) both left-wing populist parties and formally in Venezuela.

Leaders of populist parties

It might be considered too extreme to say that populism is not at all an ideology to live by but the things that accompany its rise are. The characteristics that are associated with populism are not always positive. What we see is that leaders of populist parties are often rabble-rousers. Charismatic leaders that respond to popular prejudices and the ignorance of the people often shut down reasoned deliberation. This threatens deliberated



group decisions and therefore threatens honest and effective democracy. This sets a dark light on populism because those rabble-rousers are not always taken seriously and therefore their ideology is not taken seriously either.



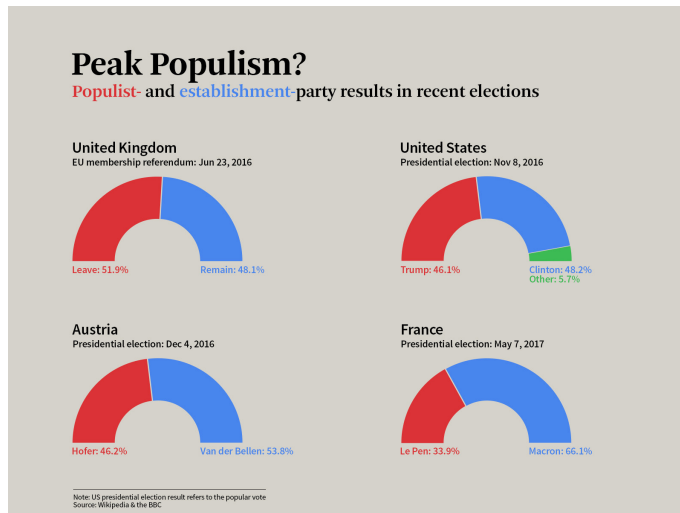
Those leaders are also a key driver behind the rise of populism. In general, it is discontent that draws people towards populism. Populist leaders and politicians often know exactly what causes discomfort amongst the general population. A common strategy is to blame this discontent on prejudicial concerns, such as innocent migrants. Populist leaders/politicians often promise to solve and dissipate these fears of the public by sometimes radical solutions.

Other reasons for the rise of populism

There are multiple reasons behind the increase in modern day populism. Economic uncertainties, feelings of unsafety or insecurity, feelings of abandonment by the authorities, are only some of the many causes. We could also see Neo Fascism as a great influence as because of that anti-semitic grows which can find a place in some populist ideas. Crisis and the failure of financial banks are also named as a big influencer. The uncertainty that comes with loss of jobs and money would have pushed people towards populism. Populism is often rising as opposition to changes that occur. It is a strong popular reaction and the strongest



defense of the values that people have and want to keep despite the problems they face.



Major Parties Involved

Major parties involved would be countries with populist governments or popular/big populist parties in their governments or political systems.

United States of America

Donald Trump, the current president, is labeled as a populist putting “America first”. He scapegoated undocumented migrants as responsible for stealing American jobs, exploiting prejudices. He spoke to many Americans’ discontent winning their vote.

European Union

In Europe populism is rapidly rising. This is explainable seeing Europe is the leading region of the world in hosting migrants. According to the International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) this number lies around 76 million migrants hosted. In all

the following countries there are populist parties active and most of the countries have also implemented anti-Europe policies or policies that tend to populism:

Germany

The 'Alternative für Deutschlands' came in third in the election in 2017. Even the minister of internal affairs Horst Seehofer from a sister party of Merkel's has now set an ultimatum on the migration policies. A clash that is possibly deadly for the coalition.

France

Le Pen (president of the National Rally political party) was beat by Macron by two thirds in the election in 2017. Her party was formally known as National Front.

Italy

The populist 5-star movement is currently ruling in coalition with extreme right party 'Lega'.

Poland

The national conservative party 'Prawo i Sprawiedliwość' (PiS) wins 39,1 percent of the votes in the election in 2015 giving them 242 of the 460 seats meaning they can rule the country alone. Populist national policies are implemented. Borders are closed for immigrants and court of justice is attacked.



Hungary

National populist party 'Fidesz' with party leader and Prime minister Viktor Orban is now running the country. Orban has implemented strict anti-refugee policies.

The Netherlands

For the Netherlands, this party would be the *PVV* (party for freedom) or *Forum voor Democratie* (Forum for Democracy). Both these parties have populist ideologies / ideas and their followers are growing in number. PVV with leader Geert Wilders came in second in the election in march 2017.

Venezuela

Leftwing populist president Chavez ruled the country from 1999 - 2013. This is an example of the consequences of when populism 'turns sour' according to Kirk Hawkins, an expert on Latin American populism at Brigham Young University. There are other factors too he says but we must keep in mind populism is one of them. Where in Europe people are attracted by rightwing nationalism, in Venezuela it was the socialist populism of the left side that was attracting for many people as there is high economic inequality.

Timeline of Key Events

Timeline of events in reverse chronological order leading up to present day that have had an impact in the political field especially concerning populism and its rise.

Date	Description of Event
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31 May 2018	<i>New coalition in Italy</i> of extreme right party 'Lega' and the populist party 'Movimento 5 Stelle' is formed and approved after winning elections on March 4.
May 2017	<i>Macron beats populist party leader Le Pen</i> by two third of the votes. Meaning almost one third of the country tends to national populist ideas.
March 2017	<i>Populist party in The Netherlands PVV</i> comes in second in elections in March.
8 November 2016	<i>The presidential election</i> of Donald Trump in the United States of America. A labelled populist and rabble-rouser, winning votes with his "mexican wall" and promises to withdraw from international treaties. His slogan: "America first" also indicates nativism and xenophobia.
23 June 2016	<i>The leave voters win in the Brexit referendum.</i> Although not everyone agrees that this is a populist outcome it does points to xenophobia and dislike towards immigrants that is often linked to populism.
2015 - now	<i>European refugee crisis;</i> unknown cultures and multicultural societies cause xenophobia to rise.
1999 - 2013	<i>Populist Chavez leads Venezuela till his death in 2013.</i> A leftwing populism runs Venezuela these years. Many consequences follow years after.
2007 - 2008	<i>Global financial crisis;</i> economic stagnation, governments are distrusted and innocent people are blamed for 'stealing jobs', prejudices are formed all of this will influence the rise of populism.
September 2001	<i>Events of 9/11</i> cause feelings of unsafety. After this human rights are violated in name of security. Xenophobia and Islamophobia are on the rise and will influence the rise of populism.
1989	<i>Fall of iron curtain;</i> immigration to the west → unemployment for western people that are more expensive workers than the cheaper eastern immigrants. Prejudices against those migrants are forming, this will be on of the first big waves of populism.
1930's	<i>The great depression;</i> unemployment etc. → a charismatic leader



that says “i can get you out of here”. A demagogue posing simple and unfeasible solutions. Anti-semitic rises. This will be the first big wave of populism.

Possible Solutions

Now we know that the issue is worth addressing. And are also aware this does not necessarily mean to suppress the rise of populism. The fourth General Assembly could look at what the consequences are and how to ensure they are not too disastrous. There are two questions posed earlier that are needing answering when deciding how to approach this issue. The most important is whether or not the rise of populism is a problem and why? Another important aspect that is less direct than the rise of populism is what this rise indicates and how to work on environments where populism isn't so popular. For example, as said earlier populism indicates multiple things such as (but not limited to):

- Public distrust in politics (corruption in governments / people feel ignored etc.)
- Increased antipathy towards immigrants (followed by praise for nativism)
- The existence of prejudices and ignorance among the common people (people are not well informed enough and for example blame the wrong people for their inconveniencies)
- Social polarization / (financial) inequalities between regions that allows tensions to grow.

The GA4 could try and solve those things so that there is no more need nor support for populism or populist rabble-rousers.

One could think of more transparency in governments and secure votings with updated and reliable voting systems. The integrity of politicians and politics is also of major importance when one wants the trust in politics to be restored or secured.

Educating and informing people of immigrants and the human rights they as well as them are entitled to. Decreasing prejudices and hoping that this way inhabitants will be more able to identify with immigrants and welcome them.

Focussing on polarized regions and maybe suggesting governments to support those in a way that trust in the authorities is (re-)established.

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