

Populism: Here to stay or temporary dissent?

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The aim of my research was to use the conference theme of ‘reimagining politics’ to focus on the trajectory of populism from the unlikely vote for Brexit, to the victory of Trump and the rise of Populism across Europe. This rise and success would form as a basis as to determining the future for Populism-whether it is a temporary blip in politics and the normal liberal order would return, or rather, this wave of populism is the new norm, and the era of true liberal democracy has come to an end.

The key to introducing my paper that would form the main body and conclusion, was an accurate definition of what populism means within a political context. My main academic reading was centred around Herman and Muldoon (2018), Muller (2016, and Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017). I began with the main definitions of Populism which I used to format my paper. This was based on Muller’s interpretation that Populism rises at times where ordinary people are angry at the current system of government. They seek to determine to have their views and interests prioritised against those of the establishment or the elite. Muller’s introduction to his book ‘What is Populism?’ is titled ‘Is everyone a Populist?’-this is a feature that I would build on within my paper to seek to determine if this current trend in the success of Populism in a global scale is likely to continue, or whether it is just a temporary shift that would see politics return to the traditional normalities of liberal and representative democracy. However, Mudde made a very interesting link between populism and Liberal Democracy-suggesting that populists tend to mobilise the most within liberal democracies than within democracies. Comparing the two, the former is a form of representative democracy in which focuses on the production of individual rights and liberties under the rule of the law, rather than just a simple representative democracy, whereby sovereignty is possessed within the elected representatives/political elites. This understanding of the development of Populism was essential for me to acknowledge within my paper in order to determine how it has grown to its present extent, and whether if at all, it will continue to develop within the political sphere going forward. This is where I would bring in my research from Herman and Muldoon. They both acknowledge the rise in Populist Parties since the 1990’s and the shift in the way mainstream parties have gone about responding to this rise. Yet they also bring in evidence to suggest that mainstream parties are adopting more populist policies such as stricter immigration

laws. They thus initiate that the radical right remain on the fringes at this moment, indicating two contrasting trends in Populism that would establish the rest of my paper.

The next part of my paper was to be focused on qualitative data that would be based around voter behaviour, and the extent to which key figures and parties have been able to convey their messages across to voters that have built their support. Ultimately, as political movements are people driven, it's clear that the extent to which Populism has continued to dominate within the political sphere, has undoubtedly been caused by gaining a vast chunk of electorate support. Through this, I have explored the use of Populist campaigning and messages expressed by party leaders, and whether it creates any impact on the electorate. This is true if slogans are created in direct link to their policies. For this, I looked at both the Trump and Vote Leave campaigns. For example, Trump's campaign slogan of 'Making America great again' suited his policies to overhaul immigration, expanding industry employment for American people, as well as an American first foreign policy approach. This attracted many voters from rare Republican voting states within the Rustbelt, who were underpinned as handing Trump victory. This group is referred to as the 'left behind' voters, who are economically left wing but socially right wing. I discovered that this is the core voter base for Populist movements.

Finally, my paper would use the above information to initiate whether Populism would continue to rise, or whether its surge is only temporary and would return to the liberal order soon. I used this fundamental question to notice very recent political trends and determine whether Populism continues to grow. The bulk of my research here was based around the 2019 European election. However, it was difficult to come to an outright conclusion as to whether populism has any leeway going forward. This is because the results were mixed for both populist and more established political parties. Whilst quantitative data suggests initially that populism is rising, such as the narrow success of Le National, the success of the Brexit Party, as well as the Five Star Movement, this has also been counteracted at the same time by the success of European green parties, such as in Germany. Key articles such as politico have suggested that the Populist turn within the EU is hardly better at all than compared to the last EU elections in 2014. Thus, whilst some may point out at the increasing rise in populism in many European countries, it is still clear to suggest that centrist established parties continue to dominate politically in comparison.

As for the current outlook, it remains very uncertain. The upcoming US presidential election would give us a more determining view of how Populism is likely to pan out in the future, given that Joe Biden is the official Democrat nominee, a well-established political figure against the incumbent populist President Trump. Will Trump be able to capitalise on the last four years with his populist approach? Will Trump be defeated, with politics, in America at least, returning to the liberal order and Populism beginning to decline? If so could it rise again? If populism continues to rise, will the liberal order eventually cease existence? These are just some of the normative questions in the increasingly uncertain era we are living within.

References

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