

Title of workshop

The causes of populism: Cross-regional and cross-disciplinary approaches

Outline of topic

Populism is everywhere on the rise. It has already been in power in several countries (such as Greece, Italy, Hungary and Venezuela) and is now growing strong in several other places with hitherto low rates of populism (such as Spain and Germany). The flourishing of populist parties and movements in Europe and the Americas has led in recent years to a proliferation of studies on the phenomenon of populism and, more particularly, its meaning, its nature and characteristics, as well as the ways it affects normal democratic politics (Canovan 1999, Weyland 1999, Mudde 2004, Laclau 2005, Panizza 2005, Barr 2009, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012, de la Torre and Arnson 2013, Pappas 2014).

However, scholars have yet to tackle the next most important question in the study of populism: What causes it? And which may be the specific mechanisms that trigger, or facilitate, its emergence? Taking it for granted that the causes and mechanisms of populism emergence depend on specific country conditions, this workshop aims at bringing together scholars from diverse world regions and various disciplines to bear on the comparative analysis of populist causality. We seek to think about key causes of populism, identify specific mechanisms, especially at the micro- and meso-levels of causal chains, analyze them cross-disciplinarily, and compare the variety of populist outcomes.

At the outset, we think within three distinct and yet interrelated theoretical and methodological approaches to the problem of populism, each posing different questions and pointing to different answers. These are:

A. *Structuralist approaches*, which try to explain populism via macro-phenomena, such as the spread of globalization, the rise of neoliberalism, or multiculturalism. If there is validity in such approaches (which very much depends on identifying particular causal mechanisms), then how exactly do those supra-national phenomena facilitate the emergence of populism at national level?

B. *Institutional approaches*, in which the focus moves from the supra-national to the nation-specific level and, in particular, the reasons that may lead democracy to either malfunctioning or decay, such as widespread corruption, the weakening of accountability, the predominance of oligarchic politics, or even the occurrence of specific political crises. And, if most democracies are nowadays badly run, what accounts for populist variation among them?

C. *Constructivist and cognitive psychological approaches*, in which the focus moves at an even lower level that includes the very specific actors at individual country level, including both leaders and voters. Here, we are interested in understanding how populism may result from the construction of specific frames by leaders or spring from the psychological fears and other cognitive biases of the voters, or both.

Relation to existing research

Based on existing research, but also following the three theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of populism, this workshop seeks to understand the causes of populism at three distinct levels of analysis: the macro global level, the medium national level, and the micro agency-based level. More specifically:

1. At the macro level, there are at least two sets of arguments with strong traction in the study of populism. The first set, which was informed mostly by cases in Latin America, and especially postwar Argentina, placed emphasis on late industrialization and its impact on civil society and its social norms (Di Tella 1965, Germani 1978). In such economic and political environments, the argument went, charismatic leaders became able to mobilize societies in new forms of social life. Much of this was accompanied by policies of state-led industrialization that, in turn, provided the material resources to win the minds and hearts of modernizing social sectors.

A second set of arguments at a macro level of analysis, which is mostly informed by contemporary European populism, focuses instead on the impact of two related developments: economic globalization and the rise of postmodern values (Kitschelt 1994, Ignazi 2003, Kriesi, Grande et al. 2006, Kriesi, Grande et al. 2012). Globalization tends to turn many hitherto well-off social sectors (e.g., workers or members of the traditional middle class) into economic losers, while changing social values (e.g., the rise of cultural diversity and secularism) pose serious threats on how those sectors used to arrange, and live, their lives. Consequently, economic losers with strong traditional values are open to appeals of radical populist parties, whether on the right (with a special emphasis on immigration and family values) or on the left (with a heavy emphasis on inequality and, hence, the need of economic redistribution).

2. At the medium level, roughly two arguments emerge. One is simply that repeated economic crises and the worsening of economic inequality in the world has turned voters against mainstream parties for their failure to implement the necessary reforms and contain crisis. This argument has a particular resonance for the rise of populism in developing countries, where democratic governance is relatively weak and corruption is both widespread and systematic. These conditions provide fertile ground for populist movements, which appear in cyclical fashion once democratic culture becomes the norm (de la Torre 2000, Hawkins 2010).

Another argument at the meso analytical level is related to the capacity of already established formal democratic institutions to prevent the emergence of third-party options. The point is that, even when crises may occur, firmly established institutions (for instance, presidentialism, federalism, electoral rules, party organization patterns) are still able to facilitate the adaptation of traditional parties and prevent the entry of newcomers. Such institutions, and the political practices they help develop, may be seen – and analyzed – as the specific mechanisms par excellence whose (mal)functioning allows or prevents the

emergence of populist parties or movement.

3. Finally, at the micro level of analysis, arguments tend to focus more on specific political agents (such as individual leaders, party factions, the media), as well as the voters. Of major importance are in this respect the specific mechanisms used by leaders to forge and convey their populist messages (ranging from symbolic framing to generating polarization to making particular alliances; e.g., Pappas 2008, Hawkins 2009) and by voters to make their election choices (including cultural biases, loss aversion and cognitive dissonance, among other mechanisms). A good part of analytical research at this level rightly focuses on populist discourse. It argues that the use of populist language by politicians is a powerful trigger that activates latent attitudes among voters (Bos, Van Der Brug, and De Vreese 2013), such as, for instance, the perceived normative threat to the community (Feldman 2003; Hetherington and Weiler 2009; Stenner 2005).

Workshop participants and type of papers required

The workshop is open to all scholars from the disciplines of comparative politics, political sociology, cognitive and experimental psychology, history, and communication studies who are interested in exploring the puzzles posited by the recent growth of populism around the world. We seek a mixed of advanced graduate students, junior scholars, and a core of senior scholars in the field who want to offer papers *empirically and theoretically testing causal arguments*. Papers examining negative cases, that is, the *non-occurrence* of populism are particularly welcome. Instead, papers focusing primarily in conceptualization and abstract theorizing, or engaging only in measuring populism, will not be accepted.

Biographical notes

Takis S. Pappas has taught comparative politics at various places including the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, the University of Strasbourg, the University of Oslo, the Central European University in Budapest and the University of Macedonia in Greece. He recently authored *Populism and Crisis Politics in Greece* (Palgrave 2014) and co-edited, with H. Kriesi, *European Populism in the Shadow of the Great Recession* (ECPR Press 2015). He currently works on a new book project under the tentative title *Democratic Illiberalism: How Populism Grows*.

Kirk A. Hawkins is an associate professor of political science at Brigham Young University, Utah, USA. He published *Venezuela's Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge University Press 2010) and co-authored, with Herbert Kitschelt, Juan Pablo Luna, Guillermo Rosas, and Liz Zechmeister, *Latin American Party Systems* (Cambridge University Press 2010). He is currently conducting a study of the impact of Populism on democracy.

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