

*United Nations Research Institute for  
Social Development.*

*Addressing Danger  
originated by the  
Increasing Spread of  
Populism*



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## *INTRODUCTION*

Populism is a very large subject, and therefore, it has many definitions, though, the best way to describe it is saying that populism is every political activity that involves promising the majorities of society what they want and need and challenging minorities and elites in order to get popularity and power.(Molloy,2018). mainly, populist ideas are spread among the society through political campaigns, propaganda, speeches by influential politicians or candidates, and various more ways in which political parties communicate with society where they claim that the wishes and needs of “ordinary” people prevail over the ones of privileged elites and minorities.

Usually populist political parties claim to speak for the people and take a position against certain institutions such as banks, the previous government, between others, and call them dysfunctional and corrupt in order to gain power.(Molloy,2018). But even populism, has different aims and ideals, and that's why populism is divided in the two sides of the political spectrum: Left wing and Right wing.

Left Wing populists are the political groups that encourage and promises support to the working class through challenging elites to gain power. It's ideals involve the promotion of the concept of equality in matters of status and wealth and the spread of liberal and socialist ideas and values, to the point they're worshipped by society.(Zabala, 2018).

Among many others, some populist leaders and politicians that stand or stood out in society are Hugo Chávez (former president of Venezuela from 1999 to 2013) and Andrés Manuel López Obrador (Founder and president of the political party Morena in Mexico), both of them claimed and claim to support the working class and the less privileged, all the while blaming and even threatening previous leaders of their nations for corruption. These kind of promises make left wing populists rise to power and gain popularity.

On the other hand, Right Wing populists are the political group that challenge elites or minorities that are seen as “unproductive” in order to gain power and “improve the economy”.Unlike the Left Wing populists, Right Wing populist ideals involve the promotion of nationalism and patriotism and the spread of conservative values among the people.(Zabala,2018).

Some Right Wing populists support business and firms to gain power, through promising more job opportunities, better infrastructure, etc.

Some examples of well known Right Wing populists are: Donald J. Trump ( Current president of the United States), Theresa May ( Current Prime Minister of The United Kingdom and leader of the Conservative Party). Promotion of conservative values and challenging minorities such as immigrants is what make right wing populists acquire power. While this may sound like a simple harmless strategy to obtain more followers in politics, populism can actually cause great economic and social harm to society.

Populist politicians usually tend to oversee the rights of all the population, and focuses on pleasing the popular opinion. This may lead to an increase in discrimination against minorities such as immigrants, the LGBTQ community, racial minorities, etc. The needs of these groups will not be prioritized in the rise of a populist government, and their rights can get to be ignored or even violated by majorities or even the authorities themselves. (Roth,2017).

A clear example of this can be religious oppression, for instance, in The United States, where discrimination against islamic people has increased severely due to the popular opinion that the muslim religion is affiliated to terrorism. Populism is involved in this problem due to President Trump agreeing with this popular claim and even creating regulations in airports with islamic people. (Barnum,2018).

Regarding the economy, populism can be dangerous for several reasons, the first one being explained by the economic theory “animal spirits” by John Maynard Keynes. This theory claims that human emotion drives customer confidence which affects consumption, therefore can create an increase or decrease in inflation levels. (Momoh, 2018). This means that If society is expecting inflation levels to rise or drop because of the promises of a populist leader, consumption of goods will be affected, and can create serious changes in the business cycle which wil affect firms in production costs, levels of consumption, etc. Some businesses may even find themselves in bankruptcy if it comes to that point.

Another economic danger of populism is that unemployment rates can rise due to the increase of discrimination of immigrants and other social and racial groups, a Structural type of unemployment can be created because the labor force will not meet in any way the employed people rates.

Finally, populism can lead to authoritarian governments, this means a government which acts without a democracy or the people's opinions,and this can cause more serious problems like violation of human rights, economic crisis, social discord, etc.

### *HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM*

There's no specific record of when populism became official or acquired its name, nevertheless, it has risen and become notorious in several countries throughout time. Populism started to grow and to become a popular political trend around the 1920's-1940's, specially in Latin America specifically in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Bolivia. Later on, it started to spread worldwide.

One of the first populists that came to power in Latin America was Brazilian president Gétúlio Vargas, who won the elections in 1930. He's considered a Populist because of all the claims and promises he made to the Brazilian people on liberal ideals, the democratization of the state, etc. He is considered to be one of the first left wing populist presidents in history. Though, he did not keep his promises to the Brazilian people and his period as president was under a completely authoritarian government. (O'neil, 2018)

Likewise, in Argentina, 1946, Juan Perón, a populist candidate for the presidential elections, won the election by leading the "descamisados" movement from 1945 to 1946. (O'neil, 2018). Juan Perón was Vice President in La Casa Rosada, the Argentine Presidential Residence, and was forced to quit because of his failure at keeping his promises, nevertheless, people from Argentina still believed in him, so they protested in front of Casa Rosada in 1945. Some of the protestors arrived shirtless that's why this movement received the name of "Los Descamisados". A year later, in 1946, Juan Perón was elected president. (O'neil, 2018).

Later on in the 1950's, Fidel Castro started to lead revolutionary movements against former Cuban President Fulgencio Batista. He led many missions and guerillas and due to the increase of revolutionary followers in Cuba, Castro overthrew Batista's government. Using religious content in his political campaign, his promises to reform the constitution of 1940, and his history of what he went through for Cuba, he quickly gained popularity, and he became Commander in chief in the new government, and then in 1959 became premier, or in other words, the head of the Cuban government. But when he came to power, his government started to adapt radical measures, and Cuba became an authoritarian-ruled country. (Britannica E.E., 2018).

Populism then, started to grow and spread world-wide.

The People's Party was founded in 1982 in The United States of America and was an official left political populist party. Though, it did not survive for more than a year.

Regarding Europe, the first glimpse of populism was seen even before than in Latin America, towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century in

Russia, when parties challenged the urban elite known as “Narodnik”. this movement was unsuccessful in Russia but it inspired many other countries in Europe to start populist parties that really started to gain power during the 1950`s-1990`s. Some of these parties are: Poujadism party in France, and the Progress Parties in Norway and Denmark.(Harris,2018).

Another well-known populist party in Europe was the Nazi Party in Germany, created and leaded by Adolf Hitler from 1933. The Nazi Party shares traits with many other right wing populist political parties, considering that it promoted nationalism to the level people started to believe that they belonged to a superior race, which Germans used to call “Aryan Race”. This party started to oppress other groups like Jewish people, Gypsies, homosexuals, etc. creating persecutions and even concentration camps where thousands of them died. These and several other factors of the Nazi Party also led to the start of World War II. (Goss,2018).

Since then, populism has spreaded even more.

#### *CURRENT SITUATION*

Now,almost every country in the world is facing the rise of populist political parties or even individuals, and this is becoming worrisome because of all the consequences that these parties are bringing to the world.

For instance, A very well known populist leader is Donald J. Trump, President of The United States of America. His political campaign “Make America Great Again” used right wing populism, by encouraging Americans to be patriotic and spreading conservative ideals. From the moment President Trump launched this campaign, making public claims against immigrants and even making fun of feminists and disabled people, hate crimes rates in the United States increased severely, with a total of 6,212 recorded cases by the FBI in 2016. (Petulla,2017). Besides, since he launched his campaign, more and more people support ideas such as building the wall between Mexico and the United States and Mexico, oppression to Islamic people, etc.

The United Kingdom is facing a somewhat similar situation. right wing populism has made nationalism in the UK increase severely, which led to the elections that concerned Britain leaving the European Union, better known as “Brexit”. Most of the voters voted to Leave the European Union, and on March the 29th 2017, Britain officially left the European Union to have more control on migration and “improve the economy”. (Mcbride,2016). This will supposedly be good for the economy, but it might as well bring some negative consequences such as a lack of supply of workers, difficulties in international trade, between others.

Countries in the Middle East and other Arab nations, such as Turkey, Indonesia, Egypt, Tunisia, etc., are facing something completely different. A new movement called Islamic populism is rising and gaining power. In these countries, the Islamic religion prevails, therefore, Islamic populism consists mainly in claiming that Islamic features will be involved in the government. This makes the majority of the Islamic population in these nations start supporting these parties. Though, some of these features could be considered radical and do not appeal to the likes of other groups in these countries such as Christians, Jews, and even atheists. (Haddis, 2013).

In other parts of Europe, such as Italy, Poland and Hungary, right wing populist political parties are rising and acquiring power. These are coming from the people's complaints on refugees in their countries, corruption within the governments, insecurity in the streets, etc. These parties are now rising to power because of their claims to help the majority and inspire nationalism among the society. Nevertheless, this is having negative effects on the economy, for example, Greece is currently facing an economic crisis, and though populism is not the only factor that made it come to it, it is an important one. Italy is also expected to face an economic crisis caused by the empowering right wing populism in the government. (Mudde, 2015).

On the other hand, in Mexico, one of the candidates for the presidential elections, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, is a left wing populist. He claims to stand with the people, and blames the government for the corruption and violence in the country. He gets followers by supporting the working class instead of businesses and firms, and some of his proposals are socialist-like and liberal. Elites and businesses do not support this candidate due to the fact that he seeks for a radical form of equality but his methods could damage the economy of the country affecting the unemployment rates, and perhaps even making inflation rise for a severe shift in Aggregate Demand and Aggregate Supply. (Miles, 2018).

Finally, Venezuela is facing one of the most worrisome economic crises in the whole world. This happened because there were great rates of hyperinflation to the point where all products became unaffordable for the Venezuelan people. Some think that this happened because of former President Hugo Chávez, who was in fact, a left wing populist, who took the country to an authoritarian rule, opposing his original promises claiming that he'd bring a democracy to Venezuela. Nowadays, this authoritarian rule continues with President Nicolás Maduro, and the economic crisis and social discord becomes worse every day. (Fisher & Taub, 2017).

### *UN ACTIONS*

As this problem increased, the United Nations has been taking action to fight against it. Such as a conference to aware people about the problem, António Guterres, United Nations

Secretary-General, speaks during the High-Level-Segment of the 34th Session of the Human Rights Council to raise awareness about populism. As well as implementing new and already existing laws to predicated on the psychology of fear: the disproportionate though understandable fear that electorates may have in the face of the threat of terrorism. The level of the fear prevents the electorate from objectively assessing the effectiveness of the privacy-intrusive measures proposed.

The world was developing new norms and strengthening existing rules. Always Highlighting human rights concerns in all regions. By Elaborating on the applicable legal and normative frameworks governing racial equality and prohibiting hate speech and incitement to hatred and incitement to discrimination.

### *POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS*

As already mentioned before, almost every country in the world is facing the rise of populist political parties or even individuals, and this is becoming worrisome because of all the consequences that these parties are bringing to the world.

With the purpose of helping solving this issue the Research Institute for Social Development Council propose the following solutions, which could be taken in consideration during the debate:

- a. Reinforce and create new laws to reinforce human rights so populism does not affect minorities such as immigrants, refugees, etc.
- b. create a Federalism a dual mechanism of government to return the power to the people
- c. Participatory and deliberative platforms and initiatives (citizens assemblies, juries, forums) should be embedded into the decision-making processes to balance the oligarchic tendencies of electoral democracy.
- d. Civil society organizations defending human rights and equality against populism should agree on a common agenda and strategy across identity politics divides.
- e. regulation in political campaigns to reduce populist ideals.
- f. sanction politics who bring populist ideas to the society.
- g. make new elections every couple of years in the whole country to prevent politicians get into more power.
- h. create campaigns to educate and aware people about their difference and bring them together.

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### *List of countries*

1. United States of America
2. The United Kingdom
3. Republic of Italy
4. Republic of Cuba
5. Republic of France.

6. United Mexican States.
7. Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela
8. Republic of Germany.
9. Republic of Poland
10. Russian Federation.
11. People's Republic of China.
12. Hungary
13. Republic of Austria
14. Republic of Argentina
15. Kingdom of the Netherlands.
16. Kingdom of Spain.
17. Republic of Colombia.
18. Republic of Peru.
19. Federative Republic of Brazil.
20. Kingdom of Thailand.
21. Republic of India.
22. Islamic Republic of Iran.
23. Hellenic Republic of Greece.
24. Republic of Turkey.



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