5. Made in US: Populism Beyond Europe

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Unlike in most parts of Western Europe, populism is a persistent feature of US politics. For nearly two centuries, populist third-party movements have challenged the traditional parties and attempted to reshape the political agenda (Kazin 1998). In this sense, US politics are more like the democratic politics of Latin America, where populist movements are frequent phenomena (Conniff 1999). The main difference between the two regions is that populist forces in the United States are generally less electorally successful – no radical populist movement has ever won the presidency. With the 2016 presidential election, however, some scholars and quite a few pundits are wondering if this pattern has changed (Gerson 2015; Stoehr 2016). For the first time in living memory, a putative populist contender (Donald Trump) has managed to win a major party nomination. In addition, populism seems widespread: other alleged, if less successful, populist candidates dominated the ranks of the Republican Party nomination, while a similar contender (Bernie Sanders) nearly won the Democratic Party's nomination. Commentators have noted the strong ideological and stylistic similarities between these candidates and the radical populists of the left and right in Latin America and Europe, and they fear it heralds an era of polarization, irrational policymaking, and creeping authoritarianism (Carroll 2016; Seib 2016; Wofford 2016).

How severe is this latest wave of populism in the US? What lessons can we draw from this experience concerning the causes of populism and, perhaps just as importantly, appropriate policy responses? Can these lessons be applied to other countries?

To answer these important questions, members of Team Populism, an international research network studying the causes of populism, have conducted a survey measuring the populist discourse of the major candidates during the US 2016 presidential campaign. Furthermore, we have incorporated insights from our broader, comparative study of populism to an analysis of current campaign events in the US.

On the descriptive side, we find that there are some strong populist candidates in the current campaign, and at least one candidate (Trump) has become more populist. But populism in the US is still not at the level one finds in Latin American countries; instead, it is similar to what we see in many Western European countries, where radical populists sometimes win seats, but most of the populists winning pluralities or memberships in government coalitions are relatively moderate (Hawkins and Silva 2015). Thus, it seems closer to previous episodes in the US.

On the causal side, we argue that the current wave is rooted in some of the same factors highlighted by studies of populism in Europe, such as the negative effects of economic and cultural globalization or the economic crisis. But we refine this argument and argue that all forms of populism should be understood as responses to *failures of democratic representation.* We also suggest that this understanding leads to a different way of crafting policy solutions. It requires recognizing the democratic basis of populist claims and forging policy compromises that explicitly take these claims into account. Although for much of Latin America and even Southern Europe this leads to significant pessimism, for the US and most of Western Europe the outlook is potentially more hopeful.

How populist are they?

In order to measure the level of populism in the 2016 presidential campaign, we focus on populist ideas, or what some scholars call the discursive frame or the thin-centered ideology of populism (Aslanidis 2015; Mudde 2004). This perspective not only allows us to measure the level of populism of different candidates, but to

make qualitative distinctions in the type of populism they embody – especially whether they are on the left or the right.

Specifically, we define populism as a Manichaean discourse that sees politics as a struggle between a reified will of the people and a conspiring elite. Populism stands alongside other discourses such as pluralism, which also believes in democracy but avoids the demonization of political opponents; and elitism, which views politics in a Manichaean fashion but reverses the roles of the elite and the people (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser forthcoming). Although we favor this minimal definition, we recognize that other definitions prefer to add features such as charismatic, outsider leadership; movement-based organization; short-sighted economic policies; or the presence of certain types of coalitions (Dornbusch and Edwards 1991; Germani 1978; Weyland 2001). Nevertheless, most definitions see a pro-people/anti-establishment discourse as an essential feature for anything to be considered populist, and hence a baseline for measurement.

In our study we measure populist discourse through a textual analysis of speeches and party manifestos, using a well-tested technique called holistic grading (Hawkins 2009; Hawkins and Kocijan 2013). Holistic grading is a type of content analysis, in that it assigns a numerical value to the text based on the content. But unlike traditional content analyses that work at the level of words or sentences, it has coders read each text in its entirety and assign a single score, based on a coding rubric and a set of anchor texts that illustrate each point in the measurement scale. The resulting scale runs from 0 (no populism) to 2 (clear populist elements used, consistent and with a strong tone). To be clear, by "populist elements" we mean the two core elements of populist discourse: a reified will of the common people and a conspiring elite. Thus, a populist speech cannot just contain positive references to ordinary citizens, but must situate the people in a struggle with the elite.

For each text, we had two student coders read the text in its original language (English), assign a score, and complete a record with a short, typed justification for their score and illustrative quotes. All of the scoring sheets, scores, and original texts are available at the

Team Populism website, populism.byu.edu. Our holistic grading technique is not the only way to measure populism – other scholars have used other techniques of textual analysis very productively (c.f. Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011) – but it is one of the few that allows large-scaled international comparison.

The average scores for all of the candidates are in Table 1. These are averages of all the speech scores and the manifesto score, with the speech total weighted twice as heavily as the manifesto (the total number of speeches varies from 3 to 8 for each candidate). For a truly comparative perspective, we include scores for the major parties in the Spanish parliamentary election of December 2015 and the candidates for the Venezuelan presidential by-election of 2013; these use smaller but similar samples of just three texts: the announcement speech by the party leader or presidential candidate, the closing speech, and the party manifesto. Although this sample may seem small, readers should bear in mind that many studies of political ideology look only at a single text, the party manifesto; what we are doing here incorporates more information.

By way of background, the 2015 Spanish election took place less than two years after the emergence of Podemos, a widely discussed left-populist party that built off popular anger towards the post-2009 austerity measures; it was the second parliamentary election in which Podemos participated. It also marked the first appearance of Unidad Popular, a coalition of traditional leftist parties that in later elections formed a coalition with Podemos. In Venezuela, the 2013 presidential by-election was held to elect a successor following the death of Hugo Chávez. Nicolás Maduro, Chávez's Vice-President, defeated the opposition candidate Henrique Capriles by a small margin after a campaign marked by numerous irregularities.

As can be seen, the level of populism in the US campaign is more like that of the Spanish election than the Venezuelan. Consider first the US and Spanish elections. Only one candidate/party in each of these countries has a score close to the threshold of 1.5, Sanders and Unidad Popular. Below these are one or more moderately populist candidates (average scores greater than .5): Trump and Ted Cruz in the United States, and Podemos and Democracia

TABLE 1 - POPULIST DISCOURSE OF MAJOR CANDIDATES/PARTY LEADERS

US 2016		Spain 2015		Venezuela 2013	
Candidate	Average Score	Party	Average Score	Candidate	Average Score
Bernie Sanders	1.5	Unidad Popular	1.3	Nícolás Maduro	1.7
Donald Trump	0.8	Podemos	0.8	Henrique Capriles	1.5
Ted Cruz	0.8	Democracia y Libertad	0.8		
Marco Rubio	0.3	PP	0.1		
Hillary Clinton	0.2	PSOE	0.1		
John Kasich	0.1	Ciudadanos	0.0		

y Libertad in Spain. And in each country there are two or three essentially non-populist parties or candidates: Hillary Clinton, Marco Rubio, and John Kasich in the United States, and the traditional governing parties of PP (People's Party) and PSOE (Socialist Workers' Party) in Spain.

By contrast, Venezuela is a seething cauldron of populism. Admittedly, the context is different, in that we have just two parties/candidates competing in a situation of declining democracy. But it is remarkable to find that both the governing and opposition candidates have high scores across the entire campaign. For the current US campaign to end up similarly, not just Clinton but also Trump would need to significantly ratchet up their rhetoric and re-write their party manifestos. Only Sanders' discourse comes close to what we hear in Venezuela.

Because we have a large number of datapoints for the US campaign, we can break these results down across time, allowing us to look more closely at individual candidates. This is especially useful for analyzing Trump, whom some political scientists felt was not very populist at the start of his campaign (Barr 2016; Mudde 2015). The results are in Figure 1. Most of the candidates have fairly consistent rhetoric: Sanders stays high (coders all noted how

FIGURE 1- INDIVIDUAL SPEECH SCORES BY CANDIDATE
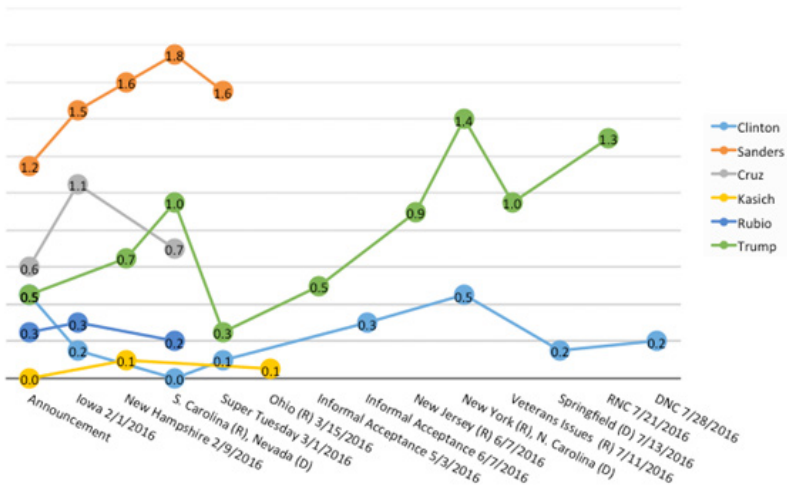
similar his speeches were), and Clinton, Kasich, and Rubio stay low. The candidate who shifts the most is Trump, who has in fact become more populist across the course of his campaign, especially after May 2016 when he effectively won the nomination.

Our coding technique also provides qualitative data that flesh out the nature and content of these discourses – including whether they were on the left or right. What we find is that the top populist candidates have issue profiles very similar to their counterparts in Western Europe. Trump, especially, is similar to radical right politicians elsewhere and different from traditional, conservative politicians in the US. In all his speeches (not to mention official campaign website; see https://www.donaldjtrump.com/positions), he speaks regularly about immigration, national safety and security, economic policy, and bringing jobs back to America. Controlling immigration (through building a wall or stronger measures of deportation) is easily the top issue mentioned, although he also emphasizes support for local law enforcement (and rejecting the claims of critical movements such as Black Lives Matter) and reducing government economic regulations.

Importantly, he distinguishes himself from traditional conservatives in his party by adopting an explicitly anti-free-trade stance and showing much greater support for traditional entitlement programs such as Social Security. And in terms of national defense, he is strikingly isolationist, expressing not just reluctance to commit US troops abroad but a willingness to unilaterally disavow key treaty obligations. This can be seen partially in the following quote from his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention:

> The most important difference between our plan and that of our opponents, is that our plan will put America First. Americanism, not globalism, will be our credo. As long as we are led by politicians who will not put America First, then we can be assured that other nations will not treat America with respect. This will all change in 2017. The American People will come first once again.

Thus, he is far more in line with current radical right positions in Western Europe, which also combine skepticism of "big government" and control of immigration with welfare chauvinism, an emphasis on law-and-order, and a retreat from the institutions of globalization.

In contrast, Sanders' speeches (and positions on his official website; see https://berniesanders.com/issues/) are more consistently leftist. The issue content of his speeches varies little across both time and location, with constant references to campaign finance, the inequality in wealth distribution, and an economy that works only for those at the top. These themes are summed up in a single paragraph from Sanders' victory speech in New Hampshire on February 10:

> Tonight, we served notice to the political and economic establishment of this country that the American people will not continue to accept a corrupt campaign finance system that is undermining American democracy, and we will not accept a rigged economy in which ordinary Americans work longer hours for lower wages, while almost all new income and wealth goes to the top 1%.

Thus, Sanders' economic positions are somewhat closer to those of Trump, differing largely in the radicalism of his solutions and his intolerance of capitalism. Where he differs more clearly is in his social positions and some of his foreign policy. Sanders expresses clear support for sexual and racial minorities (including immigrants) and liberal women's issues, and he seeks a reduced military and greater support for multilateralism and international organizations. He also expresses support for environmental regulation. In other words, Sanders hews closely to the policy agenda of many left-populist parties in Western Europe, such as Podemos in Spain or Syriza in Greece, which position themselves to the left on both economic and social dimensions.

What is causing this?

Knowing something about the level and types of populism present in the US campaign also tells us a great deal about its causes. These causes include some of the same factors driving populism in Western Europe, but they also point to a general problem of democratic representation.

US scholars and pundits have offered two arguments for the latest wave of populism that echo earlier theories coming out of Western Europe, namely, economic frustration and cultural change. On the one hand, populism seems to grow out of frustration with the negative impact of globalization on certain sectors of the economy, together with the immediate impact of the recent recession. While globalization has generally lifted national economies through gains from trade and reduced costs of transportation and communication, it harms sectors of the economy that lack comparative advantage – in the US, typically low-skilled labor in manufacturing. These losses have been magnified by the recent recession, which not only drove up unemployment and drove down wages for several years, but also erased the home equity of many indebted Americans. The losers to globalization are aware that these consequences are driven by more than just technologi-

cal change – they result from policies such as free-trade treaties and banking regulations. Hence, the losers are seeking some kind of economic retrenchment or revenge against a political elite that has abandoned them (e.g., Sides and Tesler 2016).

On the other hand, populism is also being driven by cultural globalization. Liberal, post-materialist values have made continual inroads at the expense of traditional values, including both traditional religious views and materialist, authoritarian values. The treatment of undocumented immigrants is one area where this is keenly felt, where some citizens feel that immigrants upholding different values (and who have not obeyed the law) are being given special welfare or other legal protections not normally granted to US citizens. People who hold these traditional values – typically the poor and less educated – are pushing back against the liberal progressive elite by supporting candidates who reaffirm their traditional views on appropriate family roles, national identity, and cultural homogeneity (e.g., Inglehart and Norris 2016).

These arguments clearly echo theories developed to explain the emergence of the populist radical right and, more recently, the populist radical left in Europe. Although European scholars initially argued that right-wing populist parties combined a programmatic mix of neoliberalism with anti-immigration (Kitschelt 1997), they modified their views as radical right parties shifted in response to the negative effects of globalization. Now European scholars see radical right populists defined by a mixture of welfare state chauvinism, anti-EU policies, and immigration controls (Mudde 2007). In contrast, left-wing populists have adopted only the economic side of the populist package, favoring a more radical statist position involving heavy government participation in the economy, combined with a culturally diverse stance (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014).

Our description of Trump and Sanders' campaign rhetoric shows that these same patterns exist in the current wave of US populism. Thus, we think it is fair to argue that these factors – economic and cultural globalization, aggravated by the recent recession – are the initial links in a causal chain that produces support for populist parties in both Western Europe and the US today.

However, we feel that these initial causes provide only half an explanation, pointing us to the programmatic bases of specific populist parties but not the underlying reasons for their populist appeal. In other words, they explain why voters support populists of the right or left, and what constitutes these ideological positions today. But they do not explain why these parties are *populist* and what if anything voters find attractive about this discourse. After all, other non-populist varieties of parties with similar ideological stances are available – including not only extreme nationalist parties and reformed parties of the left, but in some cases mainstream traditional parties that have begun to adjust their programmatic stances.

To provide the other links in this causal chain, we and a variety of other social scientists have begun to suggest that populism generally is a response to perceived *failures of democratic representation* (Hawkins, Read, and Pauwels forthcoming; Kriesi 2014; Oliver and Rahn 2016; Rovira Kaltwasser 2014). This perspective looks seriously at the substance of populist ideas, which are essentially a claim rooted in democratic theory. Democratic theory argues that, because all members of the political community are possessors of agency, they are entitled to equality before the law and deserve to constitute sovereignty, each citizen having an equal claim to the exercise of that sovereignty (O'Donnell 2001). Populism argues that these rights are being violated: rulers are using their access to the state to benefit themselves at the expense of the citizenry. Of course, populism goes further than this, arguing that this elite is acting knowingly and in concert, i.e., as part of a conspiracy, and that desperate measures are justified, including eliminating some of the key institutions of liberal democracy. But underlying this more paranoid prescription is the fundamental claim that the equal protection of the law has been violated, hence, a failure of democratic representation in the deepest sense.

In addition, failures of democratic representation tend to occur in one of two modes that correspond to the basic type of party-based representation: clientelistic or programmatic. Party systems that depend on the conditional exchange of government goods and services for votes, or clientelism, are much more likely to feature

highly radical populists in power. Clientelistic party systems create many more opportunities for corruption and prevent governments from providing the kinds of public goods required for strong participation in a globalized, knowledge-based economy; not only is the rule of law weak, but economic performance is lower and policy crises are more frequent. In contrast, programmatic party systems that depend on the provision of policy programs utilizing universalistic criteria, or programmatic competition, are prone to relatively minor representational failures when parties fail to adapt to changing voter demands. Here governance is much stronger and policy crisis are more short-lived, and complaints about elite conspiracies are concentrated among particular constituencies and parties (Bornschier 2016; Kenny 2016).

This more complete theory goes a long ways towards explaining the predominance of radical populists in Latin America and Southern Europe, and the relatively mild experience of populism in the United States and other developed democracies. For historical reasons, countries such as Venezuela, Ecuador, and Greece tend to feature much greater levels of clientelism, corruption, and bad policy. Populists here cause serious and frequent disruptions to the institutions of democracy because the surrounding context is more likely to generate the kinds of problems that large numbers of citizens will interpret as a failure of democratic representation. In contrast, countries such Canada and the United States have relatively robust, well-functioning states. Consequently, populist movements are somewhat less frequent and, while they help reshape the political agenda, they rarely win outright power. A similar situation may now be emerging in Western Europe, which for various reasons (especially the trauma of fascism) has not experienced many strong populist movements since the interwar period. The current wave of populism may be something closer to the democratic norm.

Seen in this light, the 2016 US presidential campaign is similar to previous populist moments, reflecting a temporary disconnect between traditional parties and their constituents, rather than widespread outrage at a political system that has routinely failed to satisfy

basic standards of governance. Globalization and the Great Reces-
sion are very real phenomena affecting many lives, but they are tem-
porary and will probably be dealt with by establishment candidates
from the traditional parties as they adapt to and absorb the issues be-
ing raised by populist challengers. Trump and Sanders (as well some
of the minor candidates from the Republican Party) are generally not
targeting core institutions of US democracy or threatening to elimi-
nate liberal capitalism, even though they clearly promise to modify
some particularly hated policies. If they were elected, their impact
on democracy would be limited not only by their own discourses,
but by significant support for traditional institutions coming from
opponents who are not as dissatisfied with US democracy.

Policy implications

None of this implies that the current wave of populism should sim-
ply be waited out. Programmatic party systems in the US and West-
ern European democracies will survive only if they respond and
adapt to this changing political agenda. Indeed, unlike in clientelis-
tic systems where parties and politicians often become immobile
and unresponsive, parties in these programmatic party systems are
in many cases already adjusting. The question is what kinds of ad-
justments are most likely to prove successful.

   While important positional shifts have to be made to accommo-
date the material and cultural demands generated by globalization
and the economic recession, the ideational theory of populism sug-
gests one important tactic. It is one that most current US politicians
and intellectuals have not yet adopted, and one that has been largely
ignored by the Western European policy elite. This is the sugges-
tion that politicians take the claims of populist voters seriously and
respectfully. The dominant approach by the policy elite in the US
and Europe has been to dismiss populist claims as products of igno-
rance and backwardness. For example, American political scientists
have spent a great deal of time trying to demonstrate that Trump
supporters are bearers of deep-seated authoritarian values, a per-

sonality that is inimical to modernity and connected to the fascist movements of the last century. In Europe, a similar view motivates the *cordon sanitaire* that traditional parties impose on their populist competitors of the radical right.

However, populism is much more than a claim for material rewards or a privileging of traditional values, and certainly more than an emotional reaction born of low education. It is a claim that citizens are not being given equality before the law – that their fundamental rights as democratic citizens are being violated. Worse, their rights are being violated by a selfish elite that is not just deaf to their concerns, but consciously working against them. Merely redressing material concerns or traditional values will not respond to this deeper claim and, perhaps just as importantly, addressing the deeper claim may make it unnecessary to fully respond to other material or values-based claims. On the contrary, it opens up novel compromises.

For example, right-wing populist concerns about immigration effectively represent a sense that immigrants are being privileged at the expense of citizens. If true, this is a serious violation of democratic norms, not (necessarily only) a statement of xenophobia. Citizens are supposed to be the bearers of distinct, significant privileges in their home country, privileges that cannot be granted to non-citizens if citizenship is still to retain its meaning – especially if doing so comes at the cost of citizens and without their consent. Redressing right-wing populist claims about immigration does not necessarily require draconian measures against all immigrants, but it does require openly acknowledging the claim as a potentially legitimate one under the rules of liberal democracy. Thus, traditional politicians could emphasize that immigration will be allowed for humanitarian or economic reasons, but that this will be done in ways that still ensure the rule of law and the full rights of citizens. In the US in particular, this could be done by simultaneously enforcing laws against employing illegal immigrants while dramatically expanding quotas for new, legal immigrants and creating a more significant, federally-supported infrastructure for their assimilation. This position would address the needs of employers and the

immigrant tradition in the US, while still recognizing the concerns of disadvantaged citizens as legitimate.

To consider another example, left-wing populist claims about the negative impact of economic globalization are expressing a concern that sectors of the population with special access to education and other economic opportunities (or simply with unusual talents) are being unfairly benefited by policies of free trade, liberalized capital flows, and deregulation. Redressing these concerns does not actually require eliminating these policies or ending globalization as we know it. But it does mean publicly recognizing the unfairness of the institutions and social structures that produce this lopsided outcome and how these privilege one set of citizens over another. In the US this could be accomplished through a credible scheme of trade compensation that provides low-cost adult education and other essential short-term welfare benefits, financed through taxes on the beneficiaries of globalization. And it could be greatly ameliorated through improvements in public education and healthcare more generally.

The precise mix of feasible policies to create these compromise positions is less important than the meaning given to them (although without real substance, the rhetoric will seem hollow). What is essential is acknowledging the legitimacy of these claims and recognizing their basis in liberal democratic norms. Recognizing this legitimacy does not mean giving up equally important liberal claims; claims are often competing and conflicting (e.g., the rule of law vs. human rights, economic freedom vs. equality of opportunity). Conflicts must be resolved through the art of politics. But dismissing populist arguments outright represents its own kind of ignorance, an ignorance of ideas and the basis of their appeal.

Conclusion

The current wave of populism in the US presidential campaign is significant and parallels what we see in Western Europe. But it is not much greater than historical levels, and certainly nowhere near

what ones finds in the instances of radical populism in Latin America. Recognizing this fact is the first step in responding to populism in this country and in Western Europe.

The second step is recognizing the basis of populist claims. Populism is about much more than a particular set of material or cultural grievances rooted in globalization or the economic crisis, although these are part of the problem. More fundamentally, it represents a broadly shared sense that current policy failures are unfair and the result of elite machinations, hence, violations of basic democratic principles of equality before the law for all citizens. In developed countries, this requires taking a different political tack. It means trying to understand the basis of populist claims and publicly acknowledging their legitimacy, thus reaffirming the rights of all citizens. Happily, embracing this response opens up policy compromises that could reaffirm the liberal institutions governing the current global order. It does not require ceding the rhetorical ground to isolationists or xenophobes.

While this suggests some room for optimism in the developed, industrialized countries, it also suggests pessimism for less-developed countries such as those in much of Latin America or even Southern Europe. In these countries, where clientelism and corruption are endemic, mere programmatic compromises are unlikely to work. The problem is not so much the lack of mutual understanding (although this is also there) but a deep lack of will on the part of the political elite, who in many instances have little incentive to engage in the deep institutional reforms required to produce a state that fully recognizes all citizens' equality before the law. In other words, while the populist conspiratorial mindset is often an exaggeration in highly developed countries, it is a perfectly rational mindset in the less developed ones. Citizens are far more likely to try to remove all of the traditional politicians and embrace radical populist movements led by charismatic leaders. Thus far, we do not have any examples of radical populists creating highly professional institutions that respect the rule of law.

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