

Left Populism, Transnationalism and Environment

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18 OCTOBER 2022



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Populism and Environment



Outline

1. Varieties of populism
2. Right-wing populism
3. Left-wing populism
4. Environmental populism
5. Leftwing environmental populism

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1. Varieties of populism

- In general, populism involves a “present ‘backlash’ against the **rationalism** and **universalism** that is often linked with **internationalism** and **globalization** as well as with the **institutions of liberal-democratic polities** – courts, bureaucracies, the media, political parties and processes, perhaps the idea of ‘liberal democracy’ itself”
(Koskenniemi 2019: 2)

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1. Varieties of populism

- There are however important **varieties of populism**;
- One way of distinguishing populism is identifying a **right-** or a **left-wing** kind;
- A second way is between **national** and **transnational** forms;
- 3 dimensions:
 - **Inclusion – exclusion**;
 - **Past- or future-oriented**;
 - **National or Transnational** (Blokker 2019)

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2. Right-wing populism

The right-wing, conservative challenge to democracy

- Right-wing populist projects often take a **conservative guise** and may be described and studied as “**illiberal-democratic**,” taking the self-description of such projects seriously but also drawing attention to substantive anti-liberal dimensions.

- Right-wing populists single out **liberalism as the main enemy** and display it as “evil and threatening”. Illiberalism or anti-liberalism forms a core dimension of the ideational foundations of right-wing, conservative populism.

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2. Right-wing populism

The right- wing, conservative challenge to democracy

- Inclusion – exclusion
- Past- or future-oriented
- National or Transnational

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3. Left-wing populism

The left-wing challenge to democracy

- Left-wing populism has a number of dimensions in common with right-wing populism, including an **anti-establishment position**, a strong insistence on **popular sovereignty**, and a **critical view** towards representative democracy and **liberalism**.

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3. Left-wing populism

The left-wing challenge to democracy

- The focus of left-wing populism is clearly on “**neo-liberalism**,” as a radicalized version of liberalism in which some principles (competition, right to property) have radically trumped others (equality, pluralism). In the words of Nancy Fraser, the “progressive neoliberal hegemony” is to be countered by a “**new progressive populism**,” which endorses social protection and emancipation (Fraser 2017).

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3. Left-wing populism

The left-wing challenge to democracy

- Left-wing populists are not (necessarily) denying a liberal, universalistic understanding of equality, as is often the case in right-wing populism, but rather criticizing national as well as global elites for promoting **restrictive understandings of equality** which prevent extensive reform on the basis of social-democratic ideas of social redistribution.

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3. Left-wing populism

The left-wing challenge to democracy

- The critique of left-wing populism in relation to rights denounces the pure defence of the core of “**classical liberal rights**” and promotes the restriction of such classical rights (e.g. **property rights**) in the name of programmes of redistributive justice (Tushnet 2018 , 645). The core struggle is hence against powerful and wealthy elites and their neoliberal programme.

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3. Left-wing populism

The left-wing challenge to democracy

- Left-wing populist parties tend to be focussed on democratic and socio- economic change, seeking significant alternatives to the existing institutional constellations.

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4. Environmental populism

- Climate change and environmentalism have different ideological roots from populism (Buzogány and Mohamad-Klotzbach 2022)
- But populism and (in particular) ecologism also have forms of overlap:
 - critique of the establishment
 - critique of elites
 - critique of the global extension of the market (Buzogány and Mohamad-Klotzbach 2022)
 - some forms also overlap in attention to radical, participatory democracy (Blokker 2019)

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4. Environmental populism

- Populism is often seen in strong contrast to environmentalism: right-wing populists engage in climate change denial and scepticism; challenge its narrative, and the defending the interests of the 'real people' (Buzogány and Mohamad-Klotzbach 2022)

- Right-wing populists oppose post-materialism and environmentalism as part of the 'liberal script' and of 'progressivism'



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4. Environmental populism

- Populism needs not however to be in contrast to environmentalism
- One can also identify forms of populism that can be seen as **inclusionary forms of environmental populism** (Buzogány and Mohamad-Klotzbach 2022)
- ‘Inclusive forms of environmentalism turn exclusionary populism on its head and show how the **“real people”** around the world are affected by environmental degradation while **globalized elites** reap profits by using carbon-intensive technologies’ (Buzogány and Mohamad-Klotzbach 2022)

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5. Transnational environmental populism

- A distinctive populist logic can be observed in **transnational** political projects, in which a transnational ‘people’ is pitted against a set of ‘transnational enemies’ (for instance, financial elites, bureaucrats, or powerful states).
- One such project is that of the **Democracy in Europe Movement (DiEM25)**, which has been identified as “transnational populism” (Blokker 2019) or “cosmopolitan neo-socialist populism” (Koch 2021)

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5. Transnational environmental populism

- How is **DiEM25** populist? (Blokker 2019)
 - friend/enemy distinction
 - inclusion/exclusion;
 - national vs. transnational



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5. Transnational environmental populism

Is DiEM25 populist?

Friend/enemy distinction

>> We, the peoples of Europe, have a duty to regain control over our Europe from unaccountable ‘technocrats’, complicit politicians and shadowy institutions. We come from every part of the continent and are united by different cultures, languages, accents, political party affiliations, ideologies, skin colours, gender identities, faiths and conceptions of the good society. We are forming DiEM25 intent on moving from a Europe of ‘We the Governments’, and ‘We the Technocrats’, to a Europe of ‘We, the peoples of Europe’. <<

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5. Transnational environmental populism

Is DiEM25 populist?

Inclusionary/exclusionary

>> '[p]eople from the north, the south, the east, the west, the core, the peripheries, Slavic countries, catholic countries, protestant countries' as well as 'a broad coalition of democrats, radical democrats, left-wing democrats, social democrats, liberal democrats'. <<

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5. Transnational environmental populism

Is DiEM25 populist?

National vs. transnational

- DiEM25 denounces the ‘Nationalist International’, which promises to ‘restore hope through taller walls that control the movement of people and goods’.
- DiEM25 follows a populist logic to the extent that it promotes a form of ‘hyper-representation’, in **constructing a unitary people** out of highly disparate parts of (European) society, and pitting it against those forces that betray the people’s interests, that is, the ‘Nationalist International and Europe’s culpable establishment’.

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DiEM's environmental
populism

anti-neoliberal
governance/
elites

local self-
governance

'real
people'



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5. Transnational environmental populism

- The Green New Deal for Europe is a campaign launched in 2019 as a follow-up on green transition goals outlined in DiEM25's **European New Deal** (European New Deal: 8) (Srám 2021);

- For DiEM25, the cause of the environmental crisis is intertwined with the **neoliberal status quo**. This includes the 'pursuit of **endless growth** that puts strain on the environment, **austerity politics**, and **alienated political decision-making**' (Srám 2021).



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5. Transnational environmental populism

- The GNDE's environmental goals are closely linked to the economy both in its **practical aspects** (policy-making, financing the transition) and **political-philosophically**, in that the crisis is essentially articulated as a crisis of neoliberal capitalism (Srám 2021);

- DiEM25's solution are not seeking to do fully away with capitalism, but rather seek to promote **new forms of economic governance** deeply grounded in **environmental sustainability** and **democratic self-governance** (bottom-up channels; local self-organize units) (Srám 2021);

▶▶ DiEM25

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5. Transnational environmental populism

Table 8.1 Value structure of economic policy—official documents

Pragmatism	Intention to build upon the existing infrastructure of EU; reformism in the short term; incremental steps
➔ Idealism	Radical changes in the long term; radical critique of (neoliberal) status quo
➔ Populism	Use of populist rhetoric; emphasis on sense of crisis
➔ Humanism	Belief in human potential; creative possibilities of participation and bottom-up political channels; solidarity
➔ Communitarianism	Community principle drives the economic solutions and social transformation
Glocalization	Transnationalism is crucial to solve global problems, but needs to be balanced by the emphasis on the local (otherwise some regions will be driven into periphery); subsidiarity and local participation

(Srám 2021)