

FORUM: NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF POPULISM IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Abstract: In recent years there has been a growing interest in the international dimensions of populism, by now a major political presence around the world. This interest however has been confined largely to the state level, especially the influence of populism over foreign policy. In this Forum we argue that it is important for analysis to move beyond the state level and view populism as a phenomenon of international relations rather than simply an element of foreign policy. The Forum discusses implications of the rise of populism for IR theory, the importance of international systemic change for the emergence of populism in national arenas, and the ways that regime type, state structure and institutions, ideational content and the political strategies of populists condition the impact of populism on world politics. In this way, the Forum identifies specific directions for the study of populism in international relations that scholars can follow in the future.

Keywords: populism; status; second image reversed; diplomacy; foreign policy bureaucracy; nationalism; globalization; IR theory

Introduction: Thinking about Populism in International Relations

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The purpose of this Forum is to assess populism's impact on, and implications for, international relations (IR) theory and practice. Populism has long been a potent political force around the world, but only in recent years have its international implications become apparent, with the weakening of international organizations and the increasingly adversarial posturing of populist leaders. In response to these developments, a burgeoning literature has emerged studying the influence of populism on foreign policy and states' external relations (for overviews see Chrysogelos 2017; Verbeek and Zaslove 2017; recent examples include Plagemann and Destradi 2019; Wehner and Thies 2021).

This Forum's authors have contributed to this literature and believe that much valuable work remains to be done in the analysis of populist foreign policy. Yet, we also share the sense that, after years of research on populism at the state level, it is time to move research 'one level up' to questions about populism as a phenomenon of international relations rather than simply an element of foreign policy. This entails thinking more systematically about how populism interacts and affects interrelationships between states, as well as between states and international organizations. Put differently, this Forum calls for a wider focus on how populism relates to systemic change, whether as its source or its outcome.

Our Forum highlights, first of all, the problems faced by most IR paradigms in accounting for populism, as the first contribution by Jenne and LaRoche shows. Movements and ideologies that challenge the legitimacy of domestic and international norms and institutions have not been systematically analyzed by most mainstream liberal, institutional and constructivist IR theorists. And while many populists appear to espouse a crude version of realism as their foreign policy playbook, their emotionally charged discourses and meddling with the institutions and bureaucracies of the state (see Lequesne and Coticchia and Donelli in this Forum) challenge central assumptions and predictions of realism as well.

Instead, debates about the impact of populism on the international system have gravitated towards the travails of the so-called 'liberal international order' (LIO) (Lake et al. 2021), as populists around the world oppose many of its characteristics, such as multilateralism, technocratic governance and its liberal norms. Here as well, however, the picture is mixed. Whereas populists often oppose aspects of the Western-dominated international order, they do not oppose all elements of it.

Depending on the ideational content of populism in power, populists can engage with some international institutions and processes, while opposing others (see Destradi in this Forum). This means that populism is now not just symbiotic with the international order and its institutions, but in some cases crucially underpins them by providing them with a mode of mass legitimation different from the classical liberal democracy once considered essential to globalization.

Academic preoccupation with the LIO and the widespread view of populism as its mortal enemy reveal not only a lacking empirical understanding of populism in IR, but also the normative inclinations of the discipline towards its subjects. A more accurate perspective would be that populism is a byproduct of the political, economic and representational externalities and deficiencies of this order. As the contribution by Verbeek and Zaslove shows, populism has developed in tandem and as a mirror image of international liberalism since the end of the Cold War, reflecting the impact of systemic material and ideational changes on domestic political institutions. IR scholars must accustom themselves to the fact that populism is, by now, less an aberration than a constitutive feature of contemporary world politics.

To be sure, such an engagement with populism is not made easier by its slippery conceptual nature, as evidenced by lingering theoretical debates in comparative politics literature. While there is a basic acceptance that populism describes a divisive mode of politics centered around a Manichaean opposition between a virtuous people and a corrupt elite (Taggart 2000; Moffitt 2017; Mudde 2004; Weyland 2001), there is less agreement on its ontological nature and implications. This Forum puts forth an eclectic perspective as the most promising pathway to develop a new research program for the study of populism in IR. To sketch out future research lines, this Forum proposes that we understand populism as a (mix of) ideology, discourse, political strategy and style, while distinguishing it from other ideologies with which it is often conflated like nationalism – this important distinction is discussed in the sections by Jenne and Laroche and by Destradi.

Despite this eclecticism, contributors to this Forum share a common understanding about what facets of populism are more relevant for research in IR. First, all contributions examine the actions of populists in power and their impact on the real world rather than populism's proclamations in opposition, as much of earlier research did (Chrysosgelos 2017). Second, contributions focus on political leaders, parties and movements rather than voters and followers of populism. While the latter are also important and can be an interesting avenue for future research (Hawkins et al 2018), we believe that the top-down personalistic nature of much of populism justifies a focus on leadership. Third, our discussion of populist cases from Western and Central and Eastern Europe, Asia and the Middle East,

demonstrates the importance of cross-regional comparison for the international study of populism (Hadiz and Chrysosgelos 2017) (owing to space constraints, this sample is naturally far from representative, especially with respect to Latin America, the region with a rich history of populism; for relevant important works there see Sagarzazu and Thies 2019; Wajner 2021).

Drilling down further, this Forum generates three sets of findings and recommendations for the study of populism in IR. First, there needs to be a closer engagement between theories of IR on the one hand and of populism on the other. Specifically, IR theorists could reflect upon existing blind spots in light of populism's critique of state power, the international order and its underlying norms (see Jenne and LaRoche in this Forum). There is also a need and possibility for cross-theorization between IR and other theoretical approaches, for example in bridging post-structural perspectives from IR and populism studies (Laclau 2005) (see Cadier in this Forum).

Second, IR scholars must think more about the relationship of populism with the international system, especially how it can generate systemic change as well as be informed by it. In this Forum, two contributions use IR concepts to show how the study of populism can highlight processes of mutual interaction between domestic and international change. Mobilizing the classic concept of second image reversed (Gourevitch 1978), Verbeek and Zaslove show that international change conditions the appearance and character of populism at the national level. Destradi uses the concept of status-seeking to show that some populists may, unexpectedly, contribute to international cooperation and the provision of global public goods. In her argument, different types of populism condition how elements of the immaterial international structure—the informal perception of hierarchy—is read at the domestic level, leading to distinctive efforts by states to challenge international hierarchies in their foreign policy practices (Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2020).

Finally, a new research program on populism in IR offers an opportunity to re-problematize the key actor and concept of the discipline: the state (Skocpol 1979; Tilly 1975). The final two contributions by Coticchia and Donelli and Lequesne examine the relationship of populist governments with foreign policy bureaucracies and diplomats. They show that the systemic effects of populism are filtered through state institutions and even regime type, raising the interesting question for future IR research of populism operating in semi-authoritarian settings (Levitsky and Loxton 2013). At the same time, state operatives like diplomats have their own agency to deal with the populist challenge, filtering, channeling or succumbing to it, depending on their institutional resources.

This set of contributions drives home the central thrust of the Forum: that research on populism, even if operating ostensibly at the state level, can and should enter into conversation with IR

approaches and their systemic perspective. As a long tradition of research in IR and transnational and state-society relations has shown (Katzenstein 1985; Keohane and Milner 1996), institutions and types of state power are important filters in the interaction between domestic society and international system. At the same time, as more and more populists come to occupy the state and attempt to restructure both state-society relations and states' interaction with the international system, the strength of populism relative to state institutions crucially conditions how successful it will be in influencing practices of foreign policy and diplomacy and, ultimately, international outcomes.

What makes this research relevant today is that the study of populism sits squarely on the intersection of domestic and international change. Change brought about by populism at the state level, whether of foreign policy making processes, diplomatic practices or state-society linkages, lies at the heart of systemic shifts, as evidenced by populist leaders in both Western and emerging powers challenging the institutions and norms of the international order. At the same time, the emergence of populism at the state level as a result of the impact of international change on domestic politics upsets many of our assumptions about state power and its relationship with domestic society. The study of populism in IR not only reminds us of the social foundations of world politics (Wendt 1992), but also highlights how today these foundations are themselves subject to contestation by restive masses and those purporting to speak in their name.

Populism and Nationalism in Visions of International Order

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What do populism and nationalism mean for international relations (IR) theory and practice? The usual answers are that ethnonationalist leaders make states more internationally aggressive and competitive (Wimmer 2012), while populist leaders favor policies of isolationism, transactionalism and economic protectionism (see Destradi in this Forum). *Ceteris paribus*, then, a world containing more populist and nationalist leaders should feature less global governance and more international conflict. What is less clear is why. In this contribution, we argue first that populist leaders mobilize around visions of state sovereignty that challenge the liberal international order (LIO) by promoting alternative illiberal ones. Second, we argue that much of the mainstream IR theory is based on liberal visions of state sovereignty that minimize the importance of these challenges.

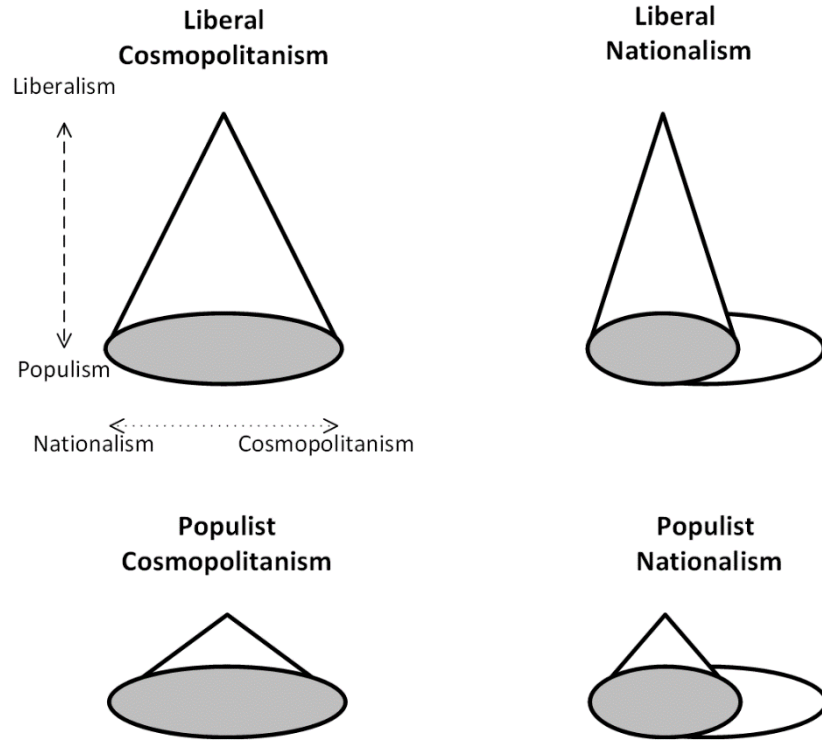
Populism and nationalism make comfortable bedfellows (Eger and Valdez 2015). They serve as powerful “modular” or “thin-centered” ideologies that can be “layered” on top of “thicker” ideologies such as socialism, capitalism, and democracy to mobilize support (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013, 149–50; De Cleen 2017). Despite being distinct phenomena, they often appear together as exclusionary discourses—populism excludes elites from the idealized *demos*, while nationalism excludes non-nationals from the idealized *ethnos*. They are connected to international politics through the contemporary norms of *popular* and *national sovereignty*, respectively. We argue that these norms roughly correspond to the inside/outside dimensions of modern state sovereignty (Eckes 2015).

Internal sovereignty encompasses the relationship between the state and its citizens—how a political community is structured, the legitimacy of some sources of knowledge versus others (including “experts,” teachers, journalists etc.); the monetary system; and territorial integrity. Populists argue for greater *internal* or popular sovereignty, meaning that the citizens or “people” have a right to self-government. This implies a pure *demos*, unmediated by foreign elites, technocrats, and liberal international organizations (Taggart 2000).

The nationalist ideology, meanwhile, calls for greater *external* or national sovereignty, meaning that foreign nations, transnational interests, or other outside actors must not interfere with a nation’s control over its resources or its foreign policy. The drive for greater independence from “outside” or “foreign” rulers can motivate independence or secessionist movements for a homogenous *ethnos* consisting of a single ethnonational group. Nationalists reject cosmopolitanism, and support the principle of sovereign noninterference, despite being violated routinely (Glanville 2013, 132–70).

Following the Essex School discourse analytic tradition, *we treat populism and nationalism as similar “in/out” sovereigntist discourses that divide in-groups from out-groups*. Despite their similarly exclusionary character, these discourses vary according to *what* they exclude: nationalism excludes non-nationals (the “in-out” axis) while populism calls for excluding elites (the “up-down” axis) from the sovereign community (De Cleen 2017, 344; De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017; Brubaker 2020). We further argue that these exclusionary discourses demarcate the boundaries of ideal sovereign communities as distinctive spatial forms. *Ideal sovereign communities* are imagined or idealized configurations of external and internal sovereignty that galvanize domestic political movements. We use the two axes of exclusion mentioned above—in-out and up-down—to derive four ideal sovereign communities: liberal cosmopolitanism (cosmoliberalism); liberal nationalism (ethnoliberalism); populist cosmopolitanism (cosmopopulism); and populist nationalism (ethnopolulism) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Sovereign Community Ideal Types



The top two quadrants capture the two ideal sovereign communities that underwrite liberal international ordering (LIO), but vary on whether membership in the sovereign community should privilege the ethnonational majority. In the upper-left, liberal cosmopolitans favor a community that is relatively inclusive in its membership, open to the LIO and technocratic rule, and distant from the people that it claims to represent (tall and wide). In the upper-right, liberal nationalism restricts the sovereign community to the national ingroup against national outgroups, however conceived. Despite the tight lines drawn around the *ethnos*, ethnoliberals are committed to representative and even technocratic rule and open to the international economy and institutions (tall and narrow).

The lower two quadrants contain the two populist sovereignties, which roughly map onto left- and right-wing populism respectively. Both reject the status quo—understood as the liberal international order and transnational elites—but differ according to how inclusive the ingroup should be. Populist cosmopolitans are most inclusive at the base but envision a community shorn of liberal elites and protected from global corporations (short and wide). Populist nationalists, by contrast, restrict their ideal sovereign community to a core ethnonational ingroup, protected from liberal elites and their global backers and from hostile or culturally different non-nationals (short and narrow). We

believe that each ideal-typical sovereign community implies a vision of how world politics work and how the sovereign community should navigate them. We further argue that, while many IR theories present themselves as purely explanatory, they also reflect underlying assumptions—sometimes only tacitly—about how the world should work.¹

Liberalism, for example, encompasses theories that explain (liberal) state practices *as well as* prescribe liberal policies (e.g., Russett and Oneal 2001; Ikenberry 2020). Liberal cosmopolitanism (cosmoliberalism) idealizes a world order that replaces exclusive territorial sovereignties with overlapping levels of governance. This maps onto IR theories of world society, which often combine descriptive and prescriptive argument. Particularly after the Cold War, post-structuralists and constructivists alike argued that the nation-state framework was giving way to non-territorial governance structures organized around an “immanent universalizing political subject” (Chandler 2009, 56). Liberal cosmopolitanism finds bedfellows with global governance agendas that recommend the expansion of liberal bureaucracy, covering a spectrum from minimalist supranational governance to maximalist visions of technocratic world statehood that transcend the sovereign states system altogether (Wendt 2003). The EU’s multi-level governance model is perhaps the closest real-world approximation of this vision.

Neo-realist theories of IR encompass *both* nationalist visions by holding that state behavior is driven by perceived national interests, which may or may not be liberal (see Mearsheimer 2018). Liberal nationalism (ethnoliberalism) envisions “a state of peace among independent states” (Doyle 2011, 206). Nationalism is the foundation for liberalism, in this view, because freedom requires a national context (cf. Yack 2012, 184–212). Liberal nationalists envision a world order of siloed ethnonational communities in search of coordinative alliances institutionalized to varying degrees. This includes alliances that band liberal governments together against illiberal or hostile others: Kant’s pacific federation centered on republics, NATO, or “league of democracies” schemes such as “the Quad.” Ethnoliberalism underwrites a surprisingly large number of Western IR theories. Liberal peace scholars argue that the presence of liberal regimes and institutions spreads “Kantian” (Wendt 1992) world politics, constituting liberal “zones of peace” (Russett and Oneal 2001, 282ff). Others advocate for international institutions backed by a liberal hegemon or, more recently, a “club” of liberal (nation-)states that stops at sovereignty’s edge (Ikenberry 2020, 294–311). Liberal nationalism *can* also include

¹ For space reasons, we restrict our discussion of blind spots to liberalism, liberal constructivism, and critical theory, leaving out (non-liberal) constructivism, the English School, and much diversity within each paradigm. Our typology should therefore be read as a non-exhaustive, preliminary, and telescoped attempt to highlight similarities, dissimilarities, and lacuna between international visions and IR theories.

neorealists who advocate for (American) domestic liberal nationalism, but who critique its reflexive internationalism (e.g., Mearsheimer 2018).

What does IR theory have to say about relations between *populist* visions of sovereign communities? In contrast with burgeoning research into non-Western historical world orders, IR research into *illiberal* internationalism is still marginal (see Hetherington and Sluga 2020). The so-called “populist Zeitgeist” of the twenty-first century is widely understood to come in two flavors: a non-nationalist “left-wing” variant and a nationalist “right-wing” variant (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013). In the lower-left quadrant, populism is combined with cosmopolitanism in what some have called “transnational populism” (De Cleen et al. 2020) and what we call cosmopolitan populism (cosmopopulism). Cosmopopulists seek to emancipate the global working classes and other subaltern groups. Because they reject elite-driven internationalism, however, they are more critical of postwar institutionalism. Mirroring cosmopopulism, critical IR theory has typically used subaltern or Marxist perspectives to critique dominant ideas and institutions of internationalism, variously argued to be neoliberal, neocolonial, and neo-imperial (e.g., Jahn 2018). Comparatively less work has examined what cosmopopulist institutions might look like concretely, especially if they are to avoid recreating a global managerial elite. The Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 (DiEM25), an effort led by former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis and Croatian philosopher Srećko Horvat to promote a Europe that is post-capitalist, post-growth and even post-national, may be the closest real-world approximation of this vision.

In the lower-right, populist nationalism (ethnopolitism) idealizes a sovereign community that excludes hostile, liberal democratic elites *as well as* national “others” (Jenne 2018; 2021; Jenne et al. 2021; Vachudova 2020). Ethnopolitists frequently use reactionary rhetoric in their critiques of the liberal international status quo (MacKay and LaRoche 2018). Rather than forge ahead into an as-yet-unrealized future, reactionaries seek a return to an idealized past or to recapture some vital lost element of it (Lilla 2016, ix–xiv). Ethnopolitists accuse both progressive elites and non-nationals of complicity in this decline; in some variations, they may be accused of plotting together to deracinate the idealized *ethnos*, as in “Great Replacement” theories. To justify their double exclusion, ethnopolitists deploy a combination of nostalgic devices: the seeming solidity of past traditions and ways of life; the civilizational decline that corrupt ruling classes neglect or engender; and the weakening of sovereignty by the machinations of elites and other-groups in the name of “progress” (MacKay and LaRoche 2018, 235–36). We see such reactionary rhetoric in Orbán’s references to Turanism, Putin’s Eurasianism, and Erdogan’s neo-Ottomanism.

The major IR contribution that theorizes such sovereignties is the work of the late Samuel Huntington (Mackay and LaRoche 2018). Fukuyama's "End of History" thesis also predicts the emergence of ethnopopulist challengers to liberal internationalism (Fukuyama 1989). These IR-adjacent arguments aside, few dominant IR theories either take up or seek to understand ethnopopulism, including liberalism's traditional opponent, neorealism, which holds that regime ideology is secondary to national interests in explaining outcomes in international politics. By the same token, alliances based on common reactionary identity might be similarly critiqued by realists because they privilege ideology over systemic imperatives and "prudent" foreign policy. By taking the nation-state as the basic unit of the international system, realism may be partially compatible with the world visions of the populist camps, but the fit is not seamless.

In this contribution, we have shown how different ideal sovereign communities imply different visions of world order—visions that map onto causal theories and practices of international relations. Liberal ideal sovereignties (cosmoliberalism and especially ethnoliberalism) correspond to dominant theories and practices of international relations that underwrite the liberal international order (LIO). By contrast, *populist* visions of world order, by now prevalent in international relations *practices*, have not yet been incorporated into mainstream IR theory. This is especially true for ethnopopulism, the growing prevalence of which challenges assumptions about historical progress embedded in especially Western-centric IR theories of the past 70 years. Many mainstream IR theories are predicated on linear, modernist conceptions of historical change, reflected in language such as "post-industrialized," "democratic backsliding," and "wrong side of history" (MacKay and LaRoche 2017). For this reason, mainstream IR theory has become less well-suited for understanding movements that challenge Western views of historical progress. We believe that IR theory in the West can be made more relevant today first by casting a critical eye at Western IR research programs such as "democratic peace theory," "democracy promotion," and "liberal peacebuilding", and second, by giving space to IR theory that is premised on the attractiveness of alternative sovereign ideals. In these two ways, IR scholars can draw attention to alternative world orders that currently compete with the liberal international order.

Explanations of the Rise of Populism: A Second Image Reversed Perspective

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So far, most studies of the populism-global politics nexus have either focused on populism's impact on foreign policy behavior or on how states conduct diplomacy and affect the authority of international organizations. Here, we propose that it is equally important to study the effects of global politics on populism at home (cf. Verbeek and Zaslove 2017). Indeed, we claim that the relationship between populism and global politics should be approached from the so-called second image reversed perspective, as pioneered by Peter Gourevitch (1978).

Gourevitch argued that we should not only be interested in the effect of domestic differences between states on international politics (the so-called second image), but also in its reverse effect (or, second image reversed). His call tied in with a renewed, at the time, interest in international influences on domestic politics among comparativists (Skocpol 1979; Tilly 1975). Since then, the intensification of globalization and the importance of transnational actors have stimulated research in the second image reversed tradition (e.g., Keohane and Milner 1996).

Curiously, although the populism literature often acknowledges the importance of international conditions (cf. Berman 2021, 80; Hadiz and Chrysosgelos 2017), it has not yet developed a causal mechanism linking global politics to outcomes in populists' domestic fortunes. This may be related to a tendency in the second image reversed literature to represent domestic politics as a mediating variable between global phenomena and macro outcomes at the domestic level (see e.g., Katzenstein 1985). This prevented the IR literature from paying attention to whether global affairs cause changes in the political system itself. This, however, is essential if we want to assess the impact of global politics on domestic populism (cf. Mair 2013, 18–20; on IR theory, see Jenne and LaRoche in this Forum).

A second image reversed take on the rise of populist parties and movements would identify two factors that impact the political opportunity structures and thus the choices made by political actors: first, changes in the polarity of the international system and the ideological discourse underpinning it; second, the dynamics of the world economy and the response of states to them. Here we will illustrate these elements by focusing on the end of the ideological conflict of Cold War opponents and the acceleration of globalization since the mid-1980s through the case of Italian populism. Italy serves as a crucial case (Gerring 2007, 115–121) because of the salience of the Cold War ideological conflict for its postwar political system. To be sure, populism existed before the end of the Cold War, but we

argue that the ideological consequences of the new geopolitical context, in tandem with globalization, helped shape conditions that allowed for more political diversity across the globe. Populism is but one manifestation of this diversity. Competitive authoritarian regimes, such as Putin's Russia, would be another (Levitsky and Loxton 2013; see also Coticchia and Donelli in this Forum).

The fall of the Berlin Wall symbolizes the end of the bipolar world and the beginning of the so-called unipolar moment. It also meant that the ideological conflict between liberal democracy and communism shifted after 1989 towards the expectation that liberal democracy would be "the only game in town" (cf. Fukuyama 1989). This shift changed the dynamics of politics in many countries. First, the traditional elites' role as "natural defenders against communism" (e.g., in the Netherlands) or as guarantors of neutrality (e.g., in Austria) and the resulting monopoly of mainstream parties were no longer taken for granted. Also, the ideological victory of liberal democracy sparked a debate on what democracy actually should mean. Together, these conditions facilitated the rise of populist parties who questioned the role of vested elites and often introduced a deviant, radical view of democracy.

In Western Europe especially, the ideological vacuum not only undermined communist and socialist parties, but also made center-right parties accountable for their socio-economic policies now that the security threat to their societies had disappeared. Consequently, following the waning of the cleavages that underpinned the post-World War II party systems, we witnessed an increase in electoral volatility and a decline in support for mainstream parties, often resulting in power shifts in countries where specific parties had long been dominant e.g., Austria and the Netherlands in 1994.

In Central and Eastern Europe, the end of the Cold War delegitimized the communist notion of a people of peasants and workers, thus creating a demand for populist actors to redefine the people: in Hungary Viktor Orbán built his position around his authority of having played a vital role in ending socialist rule in 1989 and around a traditional definition of the Hungarian people. Importantly, the end of the Cold War also opened up old geopolitical issues that had remained dormant since 1918 or 1945 (Hobsbawm 2012): for Hungarian populists the notion of the Hungarian people implied the rejection of the 1920 Trianon Treaty, which had carved up the Hungarian nation between four states.

Similarly, in Latin America, the reduced fear of communism after the end of the Cold War allowed an oil-rich country like Venezuela to challenge the leading role of Brazil in the region (Burges 2010: 57). The rise of Hugo Chávez had been fueled by a combination of anti-globalization and anti-American sentiments, allowing him to pose Venezuela as a left-wing populist alternative forging a Latin American counter-hegemonic bloc against the transnational elites (De la Torre 2017). In the United States, the end of the Cold War coincided with a debate about the nature of American

democracy and also reduced the bipartisan consensus on foreign policy. This new political context allowed for the rise of a populist maverick president, Donald J. Trump, who partly built his electoral success on winning over the losers of globalization (cf. Boucher and Thies 2019).

Together, the end of the Cold War and globalization reshaped domestic political opportunity structures, particularly in countries where elites were perceived to have long monopolized institutions (Kriesi et al 2008; Rodrik 2018). Globalization has intensified since the mid-1980s because of advances in transportation and communication technology (Scholte 2000; Strange 1996). One consequence is that most domestic policy areas now contain a strong transnational dimension around which domestic and transnational actors can mobilize (Hill 2015). At the same time, governments enjoy less autonomy in domestic policymaking. Also, globalization causes a rift between winning and losing groups within societies. This rift is exploited by left-wing and right-wing populists alike. The former define the people/elite divide in terms of winners and losers of globalization, such as the Dutch Socialist party (SP), die Linke (Germany) and Podemos (Spain) (cf. Mouffe 2018). The latter, such as the Dutch Party for Freedom, the Italian Lega, and the Austrian FPÖ, speak of a nativist divide (Mudde 2007), often reinforced by immigration. Second, globalization is an incentive for states to pool their sovereignty by strengthening international institutions. The more these institutions are perceived to curb national sovereignty, the more they prove an opportunity for populists to mobilize against them.

These dynamics can be demonstrated strongly in the case of Italy. During the Cold War, the ideological rift between the left and right had defined and frozen the terms of party competition there. Due to its geostrategic importance, Italy was an early Cold War battleground, with the United States in the 1948 elections investing heavily in the dominance of the Christian-democratic anti-communist bloc. At the same time, on the far-left side, the organizational strength of the communist party (PCI) and its importance in the resistance during the war made it a political force to reckon with. In this situation, the Christian-democrats (DC) emerged as the dominant party, governing Italy either alone or in alternating coalitions between 1948 and 1992 (Tarrow 2019 [1990]).

But the end of the Cold War created problems for all former foes: the PCI had lost its claim to being a viable alternative to capitalism; the DC had lost its claim to being a bulwark against communism. This major change in the political climate reinforced the judiciary's determination to fight corruption (Operation Clean Hands) producing the downfall of Christian-democrats. Subsequently, Italy embraced institutional transformation (the so-called Second Republic), adopting electoral rules that favored a bipolar party system of center-left and center-right. The ideological vacuum produced by the end of the Cold War and the new electoral rules opened up opportunities in

the center-right space, which was filled by Silvio Berlusconi and his *Forza Italia* (FI) who, in true populist style, presented himself as the representative of the pure Italian people who since 1948 had been exploited by the corrupt political elite (McCarthy 1997).

Almost parallel to the end of the Cold War, globalization and European integration had paved the way for another populist party: the *Lega Nord* (LN). Northern Italian producers, often small-scale family enterprises, had proven to be successful adjusters to the economic crisis after the second oil crisis of the 1980s. At the same time, these businesses felt that the Italian state was diverting their profits to the poverty-stricken Italian South. This coincidence of international and domestic conditions paved the way for the LN, a party that beat the drum of northern regional autonomy, (then) taking a pro-European stance. The Lega's populism was reflected in its embracing of the "hardworking people of the North" hindered by Rome's corrupt elites. But in later years, the increase in immigration and the growth in European Union (EU) coordination of migration policies turned the LN into a more nativist populist party, widening its notion of the pure people to the entire native Italian nation, and shifting its anti-elitism to the EU (Zaslove 2011). Its pro-European stance transformed into a vehement rejection of European integration, helping LN to become an influential member of the first Conte Cabinet (2018-19), in a coalition with its populist bedfellow, the Five Star Movement (M5S).

The case of Italy suggests the plausibility of the influence of global politics on the rise of populism in two ways. First, changes in the international system's polarity and its ideological underpinnings affect the domestic political opportunity structures, especially the party system and the manner in which parties compete with one another, and thus the choices of players in those structures. Second, dynamics of the world political economy affect the calculations of voters as well as the ideological discourse in which they cast their vote. This warrants a wider investigation into how the end of the Cold War in tandem with globalization has played out for populism, and begs the question what a second image reversed approach would single out as crucial developments in the 2020s.

Perhaps, the heavy criticism waged against globalization combined with the rise of illiberal democracies and competitive authoritarian regimes will result in the advent of an alternative discourse competing with liberal democracy on a global scale. Such discourse might reinforce the position of both left-wing and right-wing populists. This coincides with a challenge to American hegemony by countries such as China and India. Their anti-Western rhetoric offers ideological underpinnings that may serve populists. Second, pressing trans-border phenomena, particularly global health issues (e.g., Covid-19), climate change, and migration, are likely to provide ample opportunity for populists, left- and right-wing alike, to capitalize on new political opportunity structures.

Populism and Status-Seeking in World Politics

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In November 2015, India's populist prime minister, Narendra Modi, announced at COP21 in Paris that India would make unprecedented efforts in climate change mitigation and launch the International Solar Alliance. In 2010, Turkey's populist then-prime minister Erdoğan engaged in an international mediation effort on the Iranian nuclear issue together with the Brazilian government.

Why would populist governments engage in the provision of such (global) public goods? Large parts of the literature have pointed out that populists in power undermine the so-called Liberal International Order (e.g., Lake et al. 2021) and are rather unwilling to engage in the provision of public goods, which by definition do not benefit a narrowly defined "people." Yet, this assumption is mostly based on evidence from (usually right-wing) populists in the Global North like Donald Trump in the US who was openly hostile to various international organizations and regimes (see e.g., Kazin 2016), or the populist governments in Hungary and Poland which are vehemently Eurosceptic.

Previous research has argued that one possible explanation for these variations in populist governments' readiness to engage in global governance and multilateralism can be found in *status-seeking* (Destradi and Plagemann 2019). According to this reasoning, in powerful countries that try to improve their international status (e.g., in rising powers), the potentially detrimental impact of populism on their readiness to provide global public goods and engage in multilateralism will be toned down as populists will engage internationally to improve their country's international status.

Taking these ideas as a starting point, this contribution claims that status seekers do not only address an international audience of higher-status countries in the hope to be accepted as peers in their group; they also address a domestic audience, which they seek to mobilize (Urbinati 2019) either by displaying international status gains, or by claiming to be precluded from access to a higher status group. Therefore, depending on the features of populism and on the kind of approach chosen for

² I am grateful to Konrad Ringleb and Egecan Hüsemoglu for excellent research assistance and to Johannes Plagemann for very helpful comments.

domestic political mobilization, status-seeking can either mitigate or exacerbate populism's potentially negative impact on governments' willingness to cooperate or engage in global governance.

The definition of populism as a "thin-centered ideology" is the most useful for theorizing populism's international implications (Plagemann and Destradi 2019). It understands populism as a narrow ideology that "considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and [...] argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people" (Mudde 2004: 543, emphasis removed). It is usually accompanied by a full-fledged, "thick" ideology like socialism or ethno-nationalism, which includes more concrete prescriptions about how society should work.

Based on this definition, we could expect populism to negatively affect countries' engagement in global governance and multilateral organizations. As populists claim to represent the "true people," they will likely pursue a narrowly defined "national interest" and thereby shun the costs of providing global public goods, which by definition benefit everyone (Destradi and Plagemann 2019). Moreover, skepticism of elites will extend to multilateral institutions: populists will fight to "take back control" by disavowing any arrangement that limits popular sovereignty (Chrysogelos 2020).

How does status-seeking relate to populism? In IR, status is generally understood as "collective beliefs about a given state's ranking on valued attributes" (Larson et al. 2014, 7). Correspondingly, status-seeking involves efforts to "influence others' perceptions of a state's relative standing" (ibid., 11). This can happen by conforming to the norms of an elite group, that is by adopting a "social mobility strategy" (see Larson and Shevchenko 2010, 71). Visible and symbolic activities such as engagement in the provision of global public goods and active participation in multilateral institutions can therefore count as status-seeking efforts since such actions are often associated with great powers.

Status-seeking can thereby *mitigate* the potentially detrimental consequences of populism: instead of focusing exclusively on defending sovereignty against allegedly intrusive international organizations, some populists will see greater advantage in engaging in those organizations as this might boost their countries' international status and help them mobilize support by underscoring that they contributed to their countries becoming respected members of the international community. Similarly, while the provision of global or regional public goods might be costly to the "people" and benefit actors well beyond it, populist governments might still consider it a useful investment to show the world and their domestic constituencies the greatness of the "people" itself.

One example of a populist government engaging in global governance and multilateralism is that of India's Prime Minister Modi. Under him, India has not only expanded its engagement in climate

governance (see above) but also tried to boost its status through “vaccine diplomacy” (Dhar 2021). India also remained engaged as one of the largest troop contributors to the United Nations – with 5548 peacekeepers deployed, it ranked 5th in 2021 (UN 2021). Moreover, in 2019 India joined the Alliance for Multilateralism (MEA 2019). Its quest for greater international status becomes evident e.g., in then-foreign secretary Jaishankar statement that India as “an aspiring leading power, at a minimum, needs to expand its global footprint” and that its contributions to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief “increased respect for India as a global citizen” (Jaishankar 2016).

Importantly, at the domestic level these international ambitions were accompanied by a populist discourse emphasizing the strength of the Indian people. In his radio speeches, Modi presented India’s engagement in UN peacekeeping and climate change mitigation as flowing from its traditional civilizational values (e.g., Modi 2017). Similarly, Modi (2016) appealed to the country’s pride, for example during the so-called demonetization in late 2016: “The whole world is watching – will hundred and twenty-five crore Indians finally attain success after facing numerous hardships? This question may be there in the world community. [...] And our country will emerge shining like gold does after a test by fire”.

Status-seeking can therefore become an important element of domestic mobilization by populist leaders. As Larson et al. (2014, 18) put it, “[h]igher social group status enhances collective self-esteem, derived from pride in one’s membership and social identity. In the modern era, people identify with their state, taking pride in its relative successes and achievements. Because national status matters, leaders may use the desire for improved standing to mobilize the population [...]” Therefore, status-seeking can mitigate the expected negative impact of populism if it is based on a populist discourse emphasizing people-centrism and the uniqueness and strength of the nation.³ This discourse legitimizes status-seeking policies that promote global governance and international cooperation despite high costs. However, there are limits to populists’ engagement in global governance, which can be expected to recede if it becomes detrimental to domestic political mobilization.

But status seeking can also have an opposite effect if populist governments perceive their country’s status as not adequately acknowledged and use this for domestic mobilization. Status is a “socially scarce” good (Larson et al. 2014, 9) that cannot be enjoyed by everyone and status inconsistencies can become a source of international frictions and conflicts (Renshon 2017). The fear of loss of

³ While it would be worthwhile studying systematically to what extent the salience of foreign policy issues influences populist governments’ status seeking strategies, the case of India, where foreign policy has traditionally had a low salience (Narang and Staniland 2018), suggests that arguments related to a country’s international rise can be used to underscore the greatness of the ‘people’.

international status can drive states to pursue “social competition strategies” (Larson and Shevchenko 2010), which “aim to equal or outdo the dominant group in the area on which its claim to superior status rests” (ibid., 72). Typical such strategies are rivalries over spheres of influence, arms races, military interventions, or “spoiler behavior” in international negotiations (ibid., 73).

According to Larson and Shevchenko (ibid., 72), this kind of status-seeking strategy will be chosen if status hierarchies are perceived as rigid and the superior status group as illegitimate. Such perceptions can be reinforced if populists highlight the anti-elitist component of populism and choose a domestic mobilization strategy focused on an “underdog” discourse. Several populist leaders consider their countries to be threatened by international or transnational elites keen to harm the “true people.” These populists will use international issues for domestic mobilization in a very different manner from populists highlighting the strength of the nation. They will claim that their country is a victim of obscure international forces and will appeal to individuals’ feelings of “misrecognition,” which connect the individual experiences of voters of populist parties with the broader assessment of the country’s position in the Liberal International Order (Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2020).

The case of Turkey reveals that populists in power can end up adopting such an underdog discourse. Particularly after the 2013 Gezi protests, Turkish Prime Minister/President Erdoğan increasingly displayed “a conspiratorial mindset that sees any contention as orchestrated by a dark international elite force, called the mastermind (*üst akıl*), and any opposition as its subcontractors” (Taş 2020, 3). The anti-elitist component of populism has therefore been increasingly prevailing in Erdoğan’s discourse (Destradi et al. 2022), constructing a direct link between a domestic and an international elite trying to victimize the Turkish people. This conveys the notion of misrecognition of Turkey’s international status at the hands of this obscure international elite. In the case of Turkey, we can therefore argue that status-seeking exacerbated the negative consequences of populism. Indeed, according to most observers, after 2013 “AKP populism has become more pronouncedly anti-Western, nationalist, and communitarian” (Taş 2020, 3).

This has not implied a complete withdrawal of Turkey from multilateral institutions – Turkey is still a member of NATO. It has continued to increase its budget for development cooperation (Köstem 2017). Yet, relations with the EU have soured and Turkey’s engagement in the United Nations has faded (Parlar Dal and Kurşun 2018). The intensification of Turkish military activities, from the occupation of northern Syria to the deployment of soldiers in Libya, as well as Turkey’s “Blue Homeland” doctrine (Çandar 2020) and corresponding tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, can be interpreted as the implementation of a social competition strategy aimed at improving the

country's status by competing with dominant powers (Larson and Shevchenko 2010, 72). In Turkey, therefore, a populist discourse focused on anti-elitism and the construction of a sense of crisis has accompanied efforts at status seeking, which in this case has actually exacerbated the negative consequences of populism (see also Cadier in this Forum on Poland, and cases of populism in Latin America e.g., Maduro in Venezuela, for similar dynamics).

Overall, status-seeking and populism can interact in different ways, and this can have diverging consequences for global governance and multilateralism. Populist governments that highlight people-centrism will tend to pursue status-seeking strategies based on cooperation ("social mobility strategies" as per Larson and Shevchenko 2010). By contrast, populist governments that emphasize anti-elitism and victimhood will rely on more confrontative "social competition" approaches as status-seeking strategies (*ibid.*), amplifying the detrimental impact of populism on foreign policy. The relationship between status-seeking and populism, and especially the domestic origins and imperatives of status seeking, should be studied in greater detail. This demonstrates how the literature on populism can offer interesting insights for IR debates, for example on how varying domestic constellations impact differently on international institutions and governance.

Populist Practices and Foreign Policy Common Sense

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While there is a broad agreement that populists practice foreign policy differently, and examples of discursive and stylistic 'transgressions' by populist leaders on the international scene abound, the practical implications for foreign policy outputs, processes and outcomes remain largely unclear. This is notably due to a tendency to concentrate on populism, while treating foreign policy as a context or terrain rather than an analytical object or *explanandum* itself. Yet, theorizing the influence of populism on foreign policy cannot stop at populism – whether as an ideology, strategy, discourse or style – but necessitates theorizing the pathways by which ideologies, domestic strategies, discourses or styles might affect foreign policy.

Walter Carlsnaes (1993, 19–28) distinguishes between three levels of explanation of foreign policy actions: the *intentional*, encompassing actors' goals, preferences and choices; the *dispositional*, referring to the "values and perceptions underlying intentional behavior"; and the *structural* level, designating

the factors such as institutions or discourse that enable or constrain action. While many studies locate the influence of populism at the first and second level, I suggest focusing on the third as, in my view, populism affects the structures in which foreign policy is made more than actions as such.

Populism does not appear to be a factor or driver at the *intentional* level, as scholars approaching it as a “thin-centred ideology” acknowledge themselves. Mudde (2004, 544) emphasizes that populism is “moralistic rather than programmatic” and, as such, offers few specific views on policy. Several works have shown that the foreign policy preferences of populist parties tend to diverge and be determined by their “thick” (or host) ideologies rather than by the “thin” ideology of populism (Verbeek and Zaslove 2017; Wehner and Thies 2021). Others have demonstrated that populism impacts less the “substance of foreign policy” than the “style and processes of foreign-policy making” (Plagemann and Destradi 2019, 297).

In that sense, there is a case to be made for placing the analytical focus *directly* on populist actors’ rhetoric and postures, rather than on their dispositions, beliefs or perceptions. The concern then is with the constitutive effects of these populist practices on meanings and identities and how this renders certain courses of action possible while excluding others (Cadier 2021). To illustrate these constitutive effects, I rely on works from Comparative Politics approaching populism as a *practice*—that is as a “way of stating, framing, and performing particular political projects” (Ostiguy et al 2021, 3)—as well as on post-structuralist scholarship in FPA and my own research on the case of Poland.

Following Laclau, populism can be understood as a *logic of political articulation* or *discursive practice* that creates certain arrangements of meaning and representations of identity. What defines populism is not ideological content, but how this content is articulated: the populist logic of articulation constructs a chain of equivalence between unsatisfied demands by opposing it to official power and, as such, dichotomizes the social into two camps, power and underdog (or ‘elite’ and ‘people’). In doing so, the populist discourse does not merely reflect these social categories but actually constitutes them, by constructing their political identity and political subjectivity (interpellation) (Laclau 2005).

In addition, populism as discourse does not simply promote, but aims to impose as exclusive and universally valid, these contingent meanings and representations: it “seeks to *hegemonise* the public sphere and shape decision-making” (Panizza and Stavrakakis 2021, 22) or, in other words, to redefine what a political community accepts as ‘common sense’. This clearly transpires in the discursive practice of Poland’s PiS populist government: Prime Minister Morawiecki (2019) placed “normality” at the center of his policy statement speech following his party’s victory in the 2019 elections, while the party’s program for the 2015 elections vowed to make the EU a “Union of common sense” (PiS 2014).

Understood in a broad sense, discourse encompasses both linguistic and non-linguistic practices (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 82–84; Weldes and Laffey 2004). Similarly, populism does not only spring up in words, but also in stylistic, aesthetic and communicative acts. In that sense, the Laclauan approach to populism can be complemented and enhanced by the insights from the stylistic (or socio-cultural) approach. These authors emphasize that, to relate to the ‘people’ as both audience and subject, populist actors rely on language, postures, gestures and ways of dressing, as well as on certain ways of making decisions (Ostiguy 2017).

Once in power, populists integrate this “plebean grammar” into governing and rely on personalistic, decisionist, rule-eroding and antagonistic forms of exercising public authority (Ostiguy and Moffitt 2021). To distance from the ‘elite’, populists parade their “championing of ‘common sense’ against the bureaucrats”, act out their “denial of expert knowledge”, and display their “distrust of the complex machinery of modern governance” (Moffitt 2017, 52). As practice—in the sense of “socially meaningful pattern of actions” that embody, act out and reify a certain discourse about the world (Adler and Pouliot 2011, 4)—populism thus makes a statement about what should be regarded as an appropriate and commonsensical way of governing. In sum, “populism redefines what is *sayable*, and hence also *doable*, in politics” (Ostiguy et al 2021, 8; see also Futák-Campbell and Schwieter 2020)).

When (re)produced from the level of government, populist meaning-creating practices can shape “the categories of common sense for foreign policy”, that is “the inter-subjective and culturally established meanings on the basis of which state officials make decisions and act” (Weldes 1999, 10). Representations of international dynamics, of the national interest, of foreign policy problems and solutions, are constructed out of these structures of meanings, which Jutta Weldes and others designate as the state’s “security imaginary”, enabling certain choices while disabling others (Hansen 2006). Though well-established (or partially crystallized), these meanings are contingent and contestable: the security imaginary is, at the same time, the “condition of possibility” (e.g., in terms of articulating foreign policy preferences or justifying certain choices), and “the unintended outcome of state actors’ representational practices” (Weldes 1999, 12). It is through articulation and interpellation that “certain representations of world politics are rendered natural and commonsensical” (ibid., 19) and, as we saw, the populist discourse is itself characterized by distinct logics of articulation and interpellation. They spill over into, and are reproduced in, foreign policy in various ways.

On the one hand, populist governments convoke subjects and objects of international politics to construct the political identity of the ‘people’ and in *othering* domestic elites. In particular, they discursively link domestic elites and foreign Others and represent them as collaborative threat to the

‘people’ (Wojczewski 2019). The PiS leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, has often charged the previous PO government of having turned Poland into a “vassal” of Germany when it was in power, and is now accusing the PO of working with the European Commission in “attacking” Poland. Thus, the PiS government has altered the representation, and partially redefined the meaning, of the EU and Germany in public and policy discourse. Whereas the EU was traditionally mainly characterized as an opportunity, the PiS has more often characterized it as a threat or risk (Zuba 2020). The PiS government’s discourse has in turn paved the way for, or enabled, a de-Europeanisation of Poland’s foreign policy interest and a de-prioritisation of the partnership with Germany (Cadier 2021).

On the other hand, having become the new political elite, populist governments are inclined to displace and project the populist logic of interpellation onto foreign policy. This entails reproducing the populist discourse and its down/up antagonisms (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017) to the regional or international level. In the rhetoric of the PiS government, Poland is often represented as an underdog whose legitimate national demands have been frustrated by Europe’s establishment. The architectonics of populist discourse is also reflected in the foreign policy motto of the first PiS government (‘Rising from our knees’) as well as in its historical policy, where it has totalized and essentialized the categories of victims and perpetrators and reactivated the representation of Poland as the ‘Christ of Nations’ (Cadier and Szulecki 2020). This contributes, in turn, to a frequent ‘anti-mainstream’ posture inside the EU, dropping previous attempts at joining the core of European powers and aiming at creating an alternative bloc through the Three Seas Initiative (Cadier 2021).

Finally, populist governments use foreign policy and diplomacy to mark a stylistic rupture with technocratic elites. The championing of common sense against bureaucrats and the distrust of expert knowledge and complex policy-making procedures are manifested in the choices of foreign policy advisors and in the sidelining or weakening of Ministries of foreign affairs (see also Lequesne in this Forum). In Poland, the PiS government has relied on structural reforms and public accusations to bring to heel the Ministry. Combined with the populist stylistic reliance on coarsened political rhetoric (what Moffitt refers to as “bad manners”), the sidelining of professional diplomats has paved the way for several abrasive, unconventional and conspiratorial statements from PiS ministers, what we could refer to as ‘undiplomatic diplomacy’.

In sum, populist actors promote distinct meanings, collective understandings and representations of Self and Other in international relations. Populist discursive and performative practices shape the structures of signification in which foreign policy is formulated, debated and implemented, delimiting the realm of legitimate and commonsensical policy. In their political communication, populists often

invoke common sense—understood however as ‘taken for granted’ (in its Gramscian understanding)—and ‘sound judgment’. In addition to placing the analytical focus on something observable—namely populist actors’ discursive and stylistic practices—the approach proposed here allows also to study the possible long-term and unintended effects of populism on foreign policy, for it “examines how discourses are naturalised in such a way as to become common sense” (Weldes and Laffey 2004, 28). While the shaping potential of populist meaning-creating practices also exists when populist actors are in the opposition, it can be expected to be much greater when they are in power, as then they control the means of public communication and speak from a position of public authority (see e.g., the attacks of PiS-controlled public TV against the LGBT community). Furthermore, the constitutive effect of populism on foreign policy may be unintended, for “the productive nature of language does not depend on nor necessarily coincide with the motivations, perceptions, intentions, or understandings of social actors” (Doty 1993, 302). Future research could focus on documenting and conceptualizing these effects further, for instance relying on practice theory to study how and whether populism in power leads to changes in diplomatic cultures.

The Inevitable Clash? Populists and Foreign Policy Bureaucracies

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Despite a growing interest in populism and foreign policy in recent years, two issues still require further investigation: the relationship between populists and foreign policy elites and bureaucracies; and the effect that this interplay has on foreign policy change (FPC) (Hermann 1990). In a multipolar international system characterized by flexible and cross-cutting alliances, the study of foreign policy change assumes greater relevance. Recent studies, despite recognizing the importance of international drivers, have focused on the domestic structural factors that foster, or hinder, change (Blavoukos and Bourantonis 2017). Within this framework, foreign policy bureaucracies (FPBs) are thought to support continuity (Lequesne 2021). However, the emergence of populism has challenged the prominence of precisely these FPBs.

So, what are the dynamics of the interaction between populists and foreign policy bureaucracies? And under what conditions does such interaction promote or hinder FPC? Destradi and Plagemann argue that populist leaders would attempt to marginalize diplomats and bureaucrats, promoting a

“centralized and personalistic decision-making process” (2019, 286). However, this kind of “personal” involvement of populists, as well as the actual interaction with foreign policy elites, have not been traced in detail. In particular, the conditions that shape the relationship between populist leaders and bureaucracies, allowing or hindering populist executives to overcome FPB resistance to enact foreign policy change, have been seldom taken into consideration (for a recent exception, see Lequesne 2021 and in this Forum). To push this agenda forward, we identify three such conditions.

First, in the literature on personalization of politics in Western democracies, scholars have devoted attention to populist leaders and “political outsiders” (King 2002; Lequesne 2021). It is important however to clarify the exact conceptual boundaries between outsiders generally and populists specifically. In a nutshell, populism is just one type of outsider politics. As all outsiders, populists as well are generally suspicious of political elites and bureaucracy, preferring to be surrounded by loyalists (King 2002; Coticchia and Davidson 2019). But populists are not characterized simply by a peripheral location in the party system. They also rely on direct “anti-establishment appeals and plebiscitarian linkages” to gain and remain in power (Barr 2009, 44). As populists rely on these direct links with the people and need to demonstrate their break with continuity of the usual elites, we expect them even more than simple outsiders to view FPBs as existential obstacles in their political strategy.

Second, the scholarly debate on FPC has mainly focused on drivers – rather than inhibitors – of foreign policy change (Brummer and Opperman 2021). Thus, we need to investigate in detail such inhibitors at the international, domestic and individual levels (Haesebrouck and Joly 2020), principal among which is the role of bureaucracies. Third, the process of populist personalization and centralization in foreign policy has been rarely studied in non-democratic regimes. Although populism in non-democratic regimes has attracted scholarly attention (Levitsky and Loxton 2013), very few studies analyze the foreign policy-bureaucracy-populism linkages in them (Wehner and Thies 2021), nor compare these interactions with those in democratic contexts.

Building and extending earlier classical approaches (Allison 1969), we hypothesize that in foreign policy, bureaucratic politics is particularly salient. First, actors who are significant to domestic policy can have less power and influence in foreign affairs. While interest groups are a key player in most domestic policy models, they are smaller, less organized, less wealthy and by extension less influential in foreign policy. The role of the bureaucracy cannot be limited to the implementation of policies. Rather, bureaucracies affect directly foreign policy formulation (Drezner 2000). Second, bureaucracy ideally constitutes an element of continuity in foreign policy because of its apolitical nature and recurrent practices. The literature also emphasizes how foreign policy change can be hindered in highly

bureaucratic states (Joly and Richter 2019). But in reality, bureaucracy is itself subject to political developments like partisan and government changes under certain conditions (see Lequesne in this Forum). In other words, variations in domestic politics can alter not only the attitudes of bureaucratic actors, but also the balances within the bureaucratic architecture. These bureaucratic changes in turn affect whether foreign policy behavior will shift. On the whole, it is important to understand under what conditions bureaucracies promote continuity rather than change in foreign policy, devoting specific attention to the interaction between populists and FPBs.

The cases of Italy and Turkey allow us to briefly examine this relationship comparatively, highlighting the relevance of different types of regimes. Italy and Turkey are examples of highly fragmented political contexts where bureaucratic structures have historically been subject to a limited spoil system that ensures continuity and higher influence on foreign policy decisions (Chelotti and Pizzimenti 2011); while Rome and Ankara have also experienced increasing personalization of power in the hands of outsiders and mavericks, including populists. Finally, the two cases allow us to investigate the different impact of populism in democratic and non-democratic systems. Whereas the Italian case falls within the range of democratic regimes, the Turkish case highlights how populism is not a phenomenon exclusively of democracies. Instead, the last decade has witnessed an increase in non-democratic regimes exploiting populism as an ideology and narrative to consolidate their stranglehold on society. In line with recent studies (Castaldo 2018), Turkey is understood here as a system of competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky and Loxton 2013). According to extant literature, the tie to Western democracies is a key trait of competitive authoritarianism typology (Way and Levitsky, 2010). The Turkish case study meets this feature as well. Regardless of democratic backsliding, Turkey keeps strong economic, diplomatic, and security ties with European countries and the United States.

Italy has been recently marked by clashes between populist leaders and foreign policy elites and bureaucracies. The all-populist “Yellow-Green government” (2018-2019) formed by the Five Star Movement (M5S) and the Northern League (LN) attracted specific interest. However, the literature has devoted attention also to Matteo Renzi’s government (2014-2016), revealing how the suspicious attitudes towards foreign policy elites of a Prime Minister labelled as a “domestically-focused outsider” (Coticchia and Davidson 2019), or in Barr’s terms a “maverick”, resulted in him relying on an inner circle of loyal personal advisers. This meant that there was little to counter-balance his activism and personal views on international politics, fostering discontinuity on certain issues e.g., adopting harsh rhetoric against the EU. However, bureaucratic conditions like the scarce salience of foreign policy

for a domestically-focused outsider and the reactions of foreign policy elites to some decisions e.g., the “diplomatic revolt” against the unusual decision to appoint a non-career diplomat as ambassador to the EU (Lequesne 2021), limited the degree of change.

The populist Yellow–Green government on the other hand promoted the image of the “government of change” aiming to “take back control” of national sovereignty. The three populist leaders, Prime Minister Conte and deputy Prime Ministers Di Maio and Salvini, conducted a sovereigntist battle against the “globalist elite”, marginalizing responsible ministers. They shaped the agenda in the perpetual clashes with traditional allies and international elites e.g., the diplomatic crisis with France because of Di Maio’s visit to the leaders of the *Gilets Jaunes*. But such “sovereigntist battle” was mainly symbolic, also because the Italian FPB strongly pushed for continuity, particularly within the EU framework (Coticchia 2021; Monteleone 2021). In Italy, we observe additional factors that help bureaucracies ensure continuity: the limited domestic salience of foreign policy, the international limitations on a middle-sized power by commitments to existing alliances and EU membership, and the role of President of the Republic Sergio Mattarella, who acted as an “institutional third head” pushing for the appointment of technocratic ministers to safeguard continuity.

In Turkey, the mutual distrust between Erdogan’s AKP party and bureaucracies of the secular-republican establishment was a major constraint in the AKP’s effort to bring about foreign policy change. The AKP had to bypass the obstructionism of the military and civil bureaucracy through a threefold strategy. First, it exploited the EU accession process and the Copenhagen criteria to reduce the power of the military. Secondly, the Erdogan government recruited a large number of officials from AKP cadres and placed them within bureaucratic structures, favoring the emergence of new mindsets and strategic cultures. Finally, AKP increased the number of institutions involved in foreign policy decision-making and implementation by creating alongside traditional bureaucratic bodies new agencies engaged in complementary areas such as public diplomacy (Donelli 2020). Thus, Erdogan promoted a progressive, top-down replacement of foreign policy elites.

After 2014, AKP has adopted an authoritarian agenda that has led to democratic backsliding (Akyuz and Hess 2018). Accordingly, foreign policy has also been adjusted to become increasingly instrumental to AKP’s domestic priorities (for parallel dynamics in Poland see Cadier in this Forum). The identification between party and leader has been accompanied by the centralization of power, set forth by a transition from the parliamentary to the presidential system. As a result, nowadays Turkey’s foreign policy is increasingly a mirror of the preferences of a small circle of powerful individuals tied to President Erdogan. AKP foreign policy has become increasingly belligerent and interventionist,

reflecting a mix of old-fashioned nationalism and novel neo-Ottomanism, and without any checks by democratic institutions, opposition parties or the foreign policy bureaucracy (Donelli 2020).

This empirical comparison shows how the rising debate on drivers and inhibitors of foreign policy change, as well as on populism and foreign policy, would benefit from a closer examination of the conditions that allow FPBs to be a factor of continuity of foreign policy. In Italy's democratic regime, specific conditions allowed foreign policy bureaucracy to underpin continuity under both maverick and populist leaders. The case of Turkey on the other hand illustrates how democratic backsliding has contributed to centralization and personalization of foreign policy. Before the authoritarian shift there, residual bureaucratic restraints prompted populists to circumvent them by creating new agencies and the gradual replacement of the bureaucratic ranks through a spoil system (Taş 2022).

More broadly, this contribution has highlighted the importance of state structure, as well as of different types of domestic populism (see Destradi in this Forum) for international outcomes. Domestic institutions can serve as inhibitors of populists' foreign policy activism, but they can also be subject to populists' effort to restructure the state. This study has demonstrated the importance for populism debates of the comparison between (fully) democratic and non-democratic or semi-authoritarian regimes over time. Differences between regime types may determine whether the effect of populism on international politics will range from indeterminate and declaratory, as in Italy's relationship with the EU, to significant, as in Turkey's case in recent years.

Populist Governments and Career Diplomats: A Structural Conflict

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The impact of populism on foreign policy bureaucracies and ministries of foreign affairs (MFA) is not at all a new phenomenon. What is interesting is that populism concerns not only authoritarian regimes as Philippines, Turkey (Castaldo 2018) and Venezuela (Sagarzazu and Thies 2021), but also countries with democratic traits which are under the rule of populist governments, such as Modi's India (Huju 2022) or member states of the European Union (EU) like Hungary (Visnovitz and Jenne 2022), Poland (Cadier 2021) or even the United Kingdom (UK) since the Brexit referendum of June 2016 (Cooper 2019b). When Sir Ivan Rogers, the permanent representative of the UK to the EU resigned in opposition to Brexit in January 2017, Nigel Farage, leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party

(UKIP), had these very revealing words: “It would be appropriate if a lot more people in that position, British ambassadors, left. The world has changed (which) the political establishment in this country and the diplomatic service just doesn’t accept” (Cooper 2019b, 800).

This quote demonstrates aptly the difference of approach in foreign policy between career diplomats and populist governments that feeds a structural conflict when the latter are in power. This structural conflict takes place along three dimensions. What is observable in the context of the EU “illiberal democracies” (the empirical focus of this contribution) can be studied in the same way during the mandates of Trump in the US, Modi in India or Bolsonaro in Brazil.

Firstly, populist politicians juxtapose a pure people, which they represent, to elites that they consider to be suspicious because of their privileged position within the state (Cooper 2019a). If we define an administrative elite as a group distinguished by the selective nature of its educational background and recruitment, career diplomats are one of them (Gherghina and Kopecký 2016). In the populist ideology, it is legitimate to get rid of these administrative elites, or even to limit their capacity for action (Peters and Pierre 2019). Facing populist leaders, career diplomats have three possibilities using Hirschman’s typology: loyalty, voice or exit (Cooper 2021). While they most often choose loyalty for the sake of keeping their jobs, they may use their voices to express their public disagreement and sometimes exit, as it was the case for a number of US diplomats of the State Department during Trump’s administration (Gramer et al 2017). During the 2017 presidential election in France, the French ambassadors to Japan and the United States also declared that they would refuse to serve the far-right candidate Marine Le Pen if she were elected (Lequesne 2021).

Secondly, career diplomats are not only elites but also experts speaking the language of rationality and believing in the reason of the State interest (Lequesne 2019; 2020). Conversely, populist politicians contest the rationality of expertise and prefer emotion as a mode of communication and explanation of politics. Throughout Donald Trump’s presidential term, American career diplomats spent their time explaining to their foreign counterparts that the implementation of foreign policy decisions would be more rational than the emotional statements announced in the president’s tweets (Cooper 2019a).

Thirdly, scholars of diplomacy inspired by postmodern thinkers and the English School have shown that one fundamental characteristic of diplomats is to act as mediators to reduce the estrangement between distinct, even opposing polities (Der Derian 1987; Sharp 2009). Inspired by Georg Simmel’s work (Simmel 1908), Sofer (1997) has offered the best analysis of the estrangement in which the diplomat finds him/herself at the crossroads of two separate worlds that s/he tries to bridge. This makes the diplomat a singular actor who aims at assuming intermediation. At the opposite

end, populist politicians readily claim for disintermediation in the conduct of diplomacy (Cooper 2019a). Populists refrain from reconciling separate worlds as for them conflict remains for them the motor of power. This difference between the populist politicians and career diplomats affects the very essence of diplomacy as a constructed exercise of intermediation.

These three juxtapositions (elite/people; expertise/emotion; intermediation/disintermediation) constitute an essential starting point to understand the conflictual relationship between career diplomats and populist governments. They underpin the desire of populist politicians to control the behavior of career diplomats in foreign policy in trying to operate what I call a “political capture”. The success of political capture is not automatic. Institutions matter as I will show with examples taken from three EU member states: Poland since the far-right party Law and Justice (PiS) took office in October 2015; Austria during the coalition between the far-right FPÖ and the mainstream Christian-democratic ÖVP between December 2017 and May 2019; and Italy during the coalition of two populist parties, the far-right Lega and the eclectic M5S between June 2018 and September 2019.

First, the hegemonic position of the populist party is crucial for populist governments to capture career diplomats. While the Polish PiS formed a coalition with two smaller parties until August 2021 and lost its majority in the Senate in 2019, it is able to impose its political line on all public policy areas, including diplomacy, similar to Modi’s BJP in India (Jacunski et al 2021, Huju 2022). In Italy and Austria by contrast, coalition governments had disagreements on foreign policy (see Coticchia and Donelli in this Forum; Müller and Gebauer 2021). The disagreements preserved the autonomy of Austrian and Italian career diplomats and their bureaucratic expertise in the decision-making process.

Second, the political background of the minister of foreign affairs matters. Whereas the three ministers of foreign affairs of Poland since 2015 were members of PiS, foreign ministers in Austria (Kneissl) and Italy (Moavero Milanesi) were outsider specialists of foreign affairs who did not come from the ranks of the populist parties. Having party members or outside specialists makes a difference in the relationship with career diplomats. Specialists are more prepared to respect the autonomy of expertise when party ideologists are more tempted to impose the populist discourse on diplomacy.

Third, the professional status of diplomats matters. In Poland, it is only after the collapse of communism in 1989 that career diplomats have been able to obtain a professional status with a certain autonomy within the State. Thus, they cannot draw from a long tradition of bureaucratic resilience vis-à-vis party politics. Combined with complete control of government and MFA by PiS, this helped populism’s capture of diplomacy: replacement of career ambassadors by partisan appointees, reform of the diplomatic career, reduction of the power of the Diplomatic Academy in the training of new

diplomats, etc. (Lequesne 2021). In Austria on the other hand, access to an ambassadorial post is reserved for career diplomats by law. Austria is the only EU member state where the entrance examination of the ministry of foreign affairs (the French term *examen préalable* is still used in Austria) is a mandatory requirement to become an ambassador (Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1999). In Italy, the corps of diplomats has similarly maintained strong respectability since the end of the Second World War. It has created a strong corporate spirit, which makes it near impossible to appoint a political (non-career) ambassador (Caracciolo di Vetri 2019). Thus, contrary to Poland, populist parties in Austria and Italy could not automatically engage in a political capture of career diplomats.

The respective influence exercised by politicians and career diplomats in the foreign policy of a democratic state must be analyzed as a multilevel game of reciprocal influence, where the bureaucratic expertise of career diplomats and the leadership of politicians vary according to each foreign policy issue (Wiseman 2021). For scholars working on diplomacy, the experience of populist governments presents an opportunity to identify the forms of structural oppositions between the politician and the career diplomat that better highlights the general nature of the relationship. Scholarly research can then draw general characteristics on the making of diplomacy.

First, if populist governments claim to represent change, diplomacy is a lot about routine and continuity, and this is where career diplomats have a comparative advantage. Because their expertise is founded on institutional memory, they stand for continuity (Hill 2015). It explains why scholars often observe that populist governments use the rhetoric of change in foreign policy when, in reality, little changes in substance (Coticchia 2021). Second, populist governments discover that it is difficult to refuse intermediation with international partners if they do not want to become pariahs (Banai 2016). In diplomatic tensions, for example between Italy and France over the meeting of M5S Deputy Prime Minister Di Maio with the Yellow Vests in February 2019, or between Austria and Italy over the FPÖ's demand of dual nationality for the inhabitants of Alto Adige, populist governments in Rome and Vienna allowed their ambassadors to defuse tensions (Lequesne 2021). Similarly, Poland's permanent representatives to the EU Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) and the Political and Security Committee (CoPS), who have been career diplomats, have always sought compromises. The constraints coming not from the international but rather the domestic context give an advantage to career diplomats vis-à-vis populist governments, who understand that they cannot assume a total strategy of disintermediation. Third, it explains why most career diplomats choose loyalty over voice or exit when populists win elections. They are prepared to put up with verbal

overstatements knowing that, in the end, populist governments speak loudly on foreign policy but seldom implement substantial change on diplomacy.

In conclusion, all populist governments are in a structural conflict with career diplomats because the latter are elites, experts and mediators. Populist governments are often tempted to politically capture the diplomatic branch in order to neutralize its independence. But to succeed, institutional conditions must be met that vary according to the national context. Thus, for the purposes of scholarly research and to avoid easy generalizations, it is useful to compare between countries with populist experiences of government in order to assess how, why and what populist governments can or cannot do vis-à-vis career diplomats and MFAs. More broadly, research on the relationship between populist governments and career diplomats warrants a general reflection on the nexus between diplomats and politicians, a topic that has paradoxically been poorly conceptualized in diplomatic studies.

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