

Call for papers
***Populism Journal* (vol.2, December 2021)**
The left-populist lifecycle in the wake of Europe's Great Recession

The post-2008 years saw the emergence of a new phenomenon in Europe, more specifically on its Mediterranean shore: left populism. However, the historical and geographical scope of left populism, the content and limits of which are subject to debate, goes much beyond contemporary European politics. Most often explicitly linked to the theoretical tradition led by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, which analyses the formation of collective identities in a post-Marxist perspective, left populism draws on a long-lasting Latin-American tradition.

These political experiences and their theoretical sources of inspiration have been subject to criticisms coming mainly from liberals and certain sensibilities of the left (Marxists and libertarians). Leaving aside the question of their relevance, the critical gesture from which they proceed is essential at a time when the electoral cycle opened by the Great recession of 2008 seems to be on the wane, thereby inviting the left-wing populist party-movements to take stock. However, in so doing, we must avoid the two symmetrical pitfalls that plague the abundant literature devoted to left-wing populism: on the one hand, approaches that equate populism with a "threat" or a "pathology"; on the other hand, approaches that see left-wing populism as the "silver bullet" to the strategic challenges and dead ends the left is currently facing.

The achievements of these political experiences are indeed mixed. After the initial successes and the spectacular irruption in their national political game (leading to concrete strategic advances and policy achievements), these movements have experienced quite similar trajectories: electoral defeats or stagnation, internal dissent sometimes leading to a split, discursive shift, uneasy implementation of their political project once in power. The European left populist "wave" of the 2010s, much like its Latin American counterpart of the 2000s, seems to be facing external constraints and internal contradictions that hamper its progress.

In order to scrutinize this left populist lifecycle on the Old Continent, without falling into the usual pitfalls of populism studies (eurocentrism, ahistoricism, therapeutic temptation, etc.), three complementary approaches must be combined on equal foot: historical genealogy, theoretical reflection and empirical study. This **special issue** of the *Populism journal* aims at providing an inventory, as complete as possible, of the knowledge, debates, and research perspectives on the left populist cycle opened in Europe in the wake of the Great Recession. Contributions coming from **various disciplines** (sociology, political science, history, philosophy, anthropology) are welcome, as well as comparative approaches including extra-European cases, whether of historical or contemporary nature.

Priority will be given to contributions focusing on the following three lines of research:

1. Strengths and weaknesses of left populism

This issue will welcome papers that study the electorate, the militant composition, the repertoire of actions, the mode of organization, the relationship to social movements, the strategy of alliances, the discourse, the practice of power and the public policies of left populist forces. These elements may vary in time and space, from one populist movement to another, these variations being themselves at the heart of sociological inquiry.

Populist left-wing parties often achieve dazzling electoral breakthroughs, but they are struggling to sustain themselves and maintain their level. How to account for this low endurance? It seems in part to reflect the profile of the populist electorate, both volatile and unfaithful, easily tempted by abstention or migration to a rival party. A second explanation relates to the structuring of left populist movements. Their tactical agility seems to go hand in hand with a great strategic fragility, both resulting from the same factors: a collective organization which depends heavily on the leader, like a pyramid which rests on the top; a virtuosity in communication and the handling of social networks which can turn against them at the slightest mistake; a flexible, light and informal structure which favours responsiveness but which lacks local presence, social anchoring, territorial networking, a common culture, collective discipline, spaces for debate, pluralism and internal democracy.

2. Evolution and institutionalization: an inescapable fate?

Do populist movements inevitably become "parties like any other"? Does their initial claim of being a "movement" rather than a party progressively fade away as the movement faces institutionalisation and the exercise of power (entry into parliament and/or government at the national or subnational level). Moreover, while Podemos and France insoumise initially wished to replace the socialists and communists in order to impose their domination on the left, they gradually adopted a more open and modest attitude, resulting in alliances with other left forces. Is such a strategic shift a sign of a trajectory that is less and less "populist" and more and more "leftist" over time? Besides the question of alliances, how do the main features of left populism (position of the leader, internal functioning, role of the parliamentary group, territorial organization, links with social movements and organized civil society) evolve over time?

Different notions have been put forward to identify what is specific to left-wing populism with regard to its organizational model, each of them emphasizing a particular aspect of it: "platform party" (participatory dimension), "digital party" (relationship to digital and social networks) (Gerbaudo, 2018), "party-movement" (relationship between the street and the ballot box) (Della Porta and al, 2017), "partisan enterprise" (capital invested and conquered by the members of these movements), "decartelized party" (anchoring in civil society and mode of citizen financing), "personal party" (centrality of the leader-founder), and so on. Each of these concepts has advantages but also limitations that should be carefully analysed in line with the questions raised above.

3. Explain the rise, success and failures of left populism

Finally, numerous comparative studies in political science question the conditions for the emergence of left populist forces, both in Europe (Damiani, 2020; Charalambous and Ioannou, 2019; Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis, 2019) and in Latin America (Anria, 2013 ; Van Cott, 2005). According to them, it seems that the emergence of such forces is often preceded by a major economic and political crisis, which "opens" the political game, allows the rise of new actors capable of capturing and capitalizing on popular aspirations, which seems to be one of the forces of leftist populism. The degree of social conflict and the inability of the governing parties to provide answers to the demands of the mobilizations (democratic, alter-globalization, ecological, feminist, anti-racist, etc.) also seem to constitute a favourable breeding ground for left-wing populism.

The reflection on the factors of emergence can be transposed to the determinants of the success (or failure) of these movements: what factors (endogenous and exogenous) favour the success of left populists and how to measure this success? Why, for example, did Bernie

Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn fail to gain access to government while Syriza and Podemos succeeded? Is it due to the rules of the electoral game, the economic context, the partisan system, the strategy deployed by each of these forces? How should we measure success? In line with the Gramscian legacy of left-wing populist theorists, shouldn't success be defined more demandingly as the ability to build a new political hegemony in the long run? If so, is this compatible with the electoral short-termism explicitly displayed by some of these movements?

Contributions

The authors are invited to submit their abstract (no longer than 6.000 signs and including their institutional affiliation) to the issue coordinators (manuelcerveramarzal@gmail.com and arturbor@gmail.com) by **April 15, 2021**, at the latest. The date for submitting the manuscript is scheduled for **July 15, 2021**. The papers can be written either in English or French.

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