Abstract and Keywords

This chapter discusses the impact of international politics on the rise of populist parties as well as the impact of populism on the foreign policy of the countries in which populist parties are present. It argues that the end of the Cold War, the advent of globalization, and the impact of regional organizations (e.g. the European Union) presented opportunity structures that facilitated the rise of populist parties. Similarly, the chapter argues that the effect of populist parties on their countries’ foreign policy is largely due to their attaching ideology. The chapter thus distinguishes between four types of populist parties, each attaching salience to different foreign policy issues: the populist radical right, the populist market liberal, the populist regionalist, and the populist left.

Keywords: populism, foreign policy, nationalism, globalization, end of the Cold War, radical right, radical left

Introduction

RESEARCH on populism tends to focus on populists’ impact on their country’s domestic politics, particularly because researchers tend to emphasize the anti-elitist motivation of both populist politicians and their supporters. This is puzzling, as in today’s globalized world, politics is less and less an exclusively domestic sphere. Indeed, the distinction between the domestic and the foreign has become less clear: domestic events spill over into the international context, while international events affect domestic affairs. Recent examples suggest that populism studies should take this into account: Hugo Chávez’s populism contained a substantive dose of anti-Americanism (Hakim, 2006; Roberts, 2012). The proposed changes in their respective political systems by the Polish populist government led by Law and Justice (PiS) and by the Hungarian FIDESZ government have provoked responses from the European Union (EU) (Berendt, 2016; Sedelmeier, 2014).
Developments such as these point to the need to take a closer look at the relationship between populism and foreign policy. Curiously, to date, few studies of this relationship exist. In this chapter, we seek to identify this link between populism and foreign policy.

This contribution offers the three following claims: (1) (developments in) international relations can have a major impact on domestic politics, helping us understand the variation in the rise and strength of populism across time and countries; (2) populist parties do not pursue identical foreign policies despite their shared distinction between the corrupt elite and the pure people: the variation in their foreign policy preferences can be understood via the specific ideology populism as a thin-centered ideology attaches itself to; and (3) populism may impact the foreign policies of states, thus affecting the relations between states. In making these claims, we seek to combine insights from comparative politics (CP) and international relations (IR).

In this contribution, we exclusively focus on populism as a thin-centered ideology (see Mudde’s contribution in this volume); this approach allows us to identify clearly the core characteristics of populism while it also permits us to theorize the substantive policy positions that populist parties may take vis-à-vis foreign policy issues. This means that, although all populist parties will cast their positions in terms of the pure people versus the corrupt elite, they may differ regarding their foreign policy positions, depending on the thin-centered ideology to which they have attached themselves. The evidence from this chapter suggests that there may be up to four different types of populist parties/movements. We categorize these four different types according to their attaching ideologies.

Importantly, conceiving of populism as a thin-centered ideology will help us make a useful distinction between the often conflated concepts of populism and nationalism. We will present our argument by drawing from empirical studies of populism in European, Latin American, North American, and Australasian countries. Before we embark on our journey, however, we need to clarify two additional concepts central to this chapter: foreign policy and nationalism.

Foreign Policy

Foreign policy is a common, yet much debated concept. In general, it refers to the intentions and actions of an actor directed at the actor’s external world (Neack et al., 1995: 18). In most cases, the actor is regarded to be a sovereign state (Neack, 2008: 9), but this perspective raises all types of problems. For one, various entities are not a sovereign state formally but are commonly regarded as conducting foreign policy: a sovereign without a state such as the Holy See; a government that has not been universally recognized as the legitimate representative of a sovereign state, such as Taiwan; de facto state(let)s that have not been recognized at all, such as Puntland or Kurdistan; subnational entities with diplomatic competencies, such as Flanders and the Walloon Region in Belgium; or supranational entities with such competencies, such as the
Populism and Foreign Policy

European Union. Here we assume foreign policy to be a property of a representative of a sovereign state because international diplomacy is still conducted predominantly by sovereign states and because populist parties manifest themselves within sovereign states.

The notion of foreign suggests that a distinction can be made between the domestic and international spheres (Kaarbo et al., 2013: 2–4; Neack et al., 1995: 6–7; White, 1989: 5); traditionally, foreign policy was about the physical security of the state and its inhabitants, limiting the main foreign policy domain to defence and assuming that the state’s other external behavior (e.g. trade, cultural ties, etc.) were subordinated to traditional security concerns. Although this ordering has always been debated, it has come under serious attack because of the end of the Cold War, the advent of globalization, and the rise of regional organizations. The end of the Cold War has made traditional security less salient and has made room for what is now called humanitarian intervention; globalization effectively has turned trade, finance, migration, and the environment into highly salient foreign policy issues that are subject to pressures from various affected domestic actors; regionalization, especially within the EU, has increased the number of actors involved in foreign policy and has forced member states to coordinate (and adjust) their foreign policy with other member states (Hill, 2003; Verbeek and Van der Vleuten, 2008: 358–62).

In this chapter, we contend that in the contemporary world, foreign policy, although still mainly the act of a sovereign state, encompasses many different policy domains and that it is the product of many actors (domestic as well as international) that feel affected by events in the outside world (Verbeek and Zaslove, 2015a: 531–2). Hence, populist parties can be expected to develop an interest in many different policy domains that currently could be considered as the object of a state’s foreign policy. In addition, in regional organizations such as the EU, populist parties may (in)directly affect the EU’s foreign policy through their membership in the European Parliament or through their member state’s governments.

Nationalism

In the process of linking populism with foreign policy, it is tempting to equate populist foreign policy with nationalist foreign policy. This requires us to discuss the concept of nationalism as it pertains to populism (see also De Cleen’s contribution in this volume). Two important issues often cloud the relationship between populism and nationalism: first, populism and nationalism are both thin-centered ideologies (Freeden, 1998; Mudde, 2004). Thus, they cannot stand alone, and they must each attach themselves to other ideologies. Second, and in part related to the first point, populism and nationalism often (but do not have to) appear together. Thus, for example, the defining characteristics of the populist radical right (PRR) are both populism and an exclusive form of nationalism,
Populism and Foreign Policy

i.e. nativism (De Cleen, this volume; Mudde, 2007), or what De Cleen refers to as “an exclusionary ethnic-cultural nationalism” (De Cleen, this volume).

If we further consider the core characteristics of nationalism, we see that nationalism often reflects populist premises because of nationalism’s emphasis on the nation, mirroring the populists’ will of the people. Conversely, if we turn to populism, we see that populism often manifests itself within a nation-state and often links the people with the nation. For example, nationalism is a defining characteristic of the populist radical right, which uses a nativist-nationalist discourse to mobilize anti-immigration sentiments (De Cleen, this volume; Mudde, 2007). In addition, the success and the failure of a populist party may be determined by the ability of the populist party to appeal to the national culture of a nation. A prime example was the ability of Dutch populist Pim Fortuyn in the early 2000s to succeed where other Dutch radical right parties had previously failed (i.e., the Centrumpartij, the Centrumpartij’86, and the Centrumdemocraten) (Mudde and van Holsteyn, 2000; Rydgren and Van Holsteyn, 2005). Fortuyn framed his populism as the protection of traditional Dutch liberalism. This allowed him to juxtapose traditional Dutch liberal values to the presumed illiberalism of Islam (Akkerman, 2005). This appeal to the notion of Dutch liberal sentiments (and his ability to contextualize it in Dutch national culture) proved crucial for the legitimization, and the success, of his party (Lijst Pim Fortuyn) (Akkerman, 2005). At the same time, populist movements need not necessarily be nationalist: they may emphasize the tension between people and elites without hammering on the question of national identity; examples include PODEMOS in Spain and Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S) in Italy.

In essence, therefore, even if populism and nationalism often appear in a single movement, the key difference between populism and nationalism is the distinction between the people and the elite, which is inherent to populism but need not be present in nationalism (cf. De Cleen, this volume). It is possible to conceive of an elitist nationalism, while an elitist populism is an oxymoron. To be sure, it could be argued that populist leaders may emerge from the political elite or the political establishment (i.e., Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, see Vossen, 2011) or that they may attract voters with elitist attitudes (Akkerman et al., 2014), but in order for the party to be considered populist it must employ a people-oriented anti-elite discourse.

Throughout our discussion of the relationship between populism and foreign policy, we therefore need to be cautious and avoid automatically equating the two. This requires us to argue more specifically which items of foreign policy are salient to populists. Describing their foreign policy attitudes as nationalist would be too one-dimensional and miss the importance of preserving the pure people as the point of departure for any policy, including foreign policy.
The Impact of International Politics on Populism
Populism and Foreign Policy

International relations (IR) and comparative politics (CP) have developed largely as separate research fields within political science. Although this has produced fruitful theory building and empirical research within each area, their separation has also resulted in mutual neglect. At the same time, it has repeatedly been argued that domestic politics and international relations are often interrelated. In IR, this has led to the sub-discipline of comparative foreign policy analysis, which seeks to account for international outcomes by examining domestic level (“second image”) explanations (Hudson, 2005). Similarly, IR scholars have engaged with the question of how processes at the level of the international system may impact domestic politics (“second image reversed”) (Gourevitch, 1978). This attention to the international-national nexus has been adopted by some comparativists (see esp. Almond, 1989) and has always been present in the work of comparative historians such as Charles Tilly (esp. Tilly and Ardant, 1975) who focused on the strong relationship between war and state building. Our contribution seeks to build on these traditions by focusing on how changes in the international political and economic systems create the conditions for changes in party competition in various countries and for hindering or favoring the rise of populism. In doing so, we will discuss the impact of structural changes in international relations on domestic political systems.

Focusing on the link between international and domestic politics allows us to examine attempts by foreign actors to influence the domestic politics of countries in which populism thrives. Indeed, there is plenty of evidence that foreign actors seek to influence domestic developments in countries where populism is strong, especially when these parties participate in government coalitions. This may lead to a lack of trust or even shaming and ridiculing behavior, e.g. when the Berlusconi government in Italy and the Orban government in Hungary were perceived to threaten political stability (Kington, 2011; Sedelmeier, 2014); it may even lead to sanctions, as when the EU took measures against Austria when the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) joined the Austrian government (Merlingen et al., 2001). Because of lack of space, we here limit ourselves to the general impact of international developments on the rise of populism.²

Within the European context, building on the discussion of radical right-wing parties, interest in populism enjoyed a growth spurt in the early 1990s (Betz, 1994; Taggart, 1995). Not coincidentally, this surge coincided with three major international transformations: the end of the Cold War; the advent of (or, depending on one’s view, a new spurt in) globalization; and the intensification of the European integration process. As a matter of fact, studies of earlier expressions of populism had already suggested that its rise and success were related to a specific international context; for example, the American Populist Movement was partly a response by agricultural producers who reacted to the steady downfall in prices into a depression in 1893. This downfall itself was partially caused by increased international competition thanks to the opening of the Suez Canal and the advent of steam transportation (Hofstadter, 1969: 14–16). Populism’s popularity among the urban middle classes in Latin America in the twentieth century, and possibly all Latin American politics, cannot be understood without taking into account the impact of economic transformations and the attempt to incorporate the disenfranchised
Populism and Foreign Policy

masses. Populist parties often attempted to accomplish this where other parties had failed; this was the case, for example, for Peronism in Argentina (Jansen, 2015; Roberts, 2015).

European integration spurred populist resentment in the Netherlands as early as the 1950s and 1960s when groups of farmers mobilized against the perceived threat of the European Common Agricultural Policy, which found its political expression in a fairly successful farmers’ party, the Boerenpartij (1966–1981) (Vossen, 2004). In this chapter, we will focus on populism’s popularity as a subject of academic research since the late 1980s and the early 1990s, when globalization is often said to have taken off (Strange, 1988) and when the European integration process began to accelerate due to the adoption of the Single European Act in 1984, which envisioned a common market by 1992 as a European response to increased international economic competition from Asia and the Americas (Moravcsik, 1991).

The End of the Cold War

The end of the Cold War restructured many Western political systems, particularly in terms of the legitimacy of different political discourses, thus redefining the political space for electoral competition. Most importantly, it left the radical left bereft of much of its ideological credentials and suggested that liberal democracy was not only the only game in town but that it was here to stay (Fukuyama, 1989). As much as this was celebrated in many circles, it soon became evident that political parties had now lost their main adversary. Consequently, the imperfections of these parties’ governments, which had widely been accepted as part of a necessary political stability in times of Communist threat, could now become the focal point of political debate, legitimizing the populist perspective of the elites as the enemy of the honest people. This contributed to the end of the traditional dominance of specific parties in countries such as Austria, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, and Sweden. These deeper and more immediate changes acted to transform old political parties (e.g. social democrats moving towards the Third Way) and to create opportunities for new political parties to emerge, particularly populist parties. The effect was not limited to Western European parties. In Latin America, radical left ideologies no longer enjoyed the same appeal as before the fall of communism, with the exception of Cuba. In Central and Eastern Europe, where few parties chose to rally behind the radical left banner, the new era caused dormant domestic issues, which had remained frozen because of Cold War restrictions, to resurface and become part of the political discourse. This was particularly true for old irredentist claims regarding territory and national identity that had not been touched since the Interbellum, especially in Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, and (the former Republic of) Yugoslavia.

Indeed, it is not a coincidence that when democracy becomes the only game in town, political differentiation will be founded on the fundamental questions underlying democracy: Who belongs to the demos and is the demos properly represented by the elite? The salience of these questions was to be reinforced by globalization and regional
integration. These developments opened up a new space for populist actors. This is not to argue that populism was nonexistent before the end of the Cold War: there are numerous examples such as Poujadism in France and Peronism in Argentina. The argument is rather that the post-Cold War era created a ripe set of opportunity structures for the rise of populism.
Globalization

Globalization might best be captured as the disembedding of social relations from territory (Scholte, 2005). Politically, the end of the Cold War removed the territorial lid on the spread of political discourse that had already been partly lifted by technological advances that had made cross-border communication more difficult to control in the 1980s, particularly satellite television and the fax machine. Substantively, democracy, coupled with ideas about the rule of law, human rights, and economic liberalism, emerged as the dominant global discourse that set the boundaries on everyday politics. Relatively speaking, economic and financial globalization has meant that producers and financial investors face fewer restrictions in moving production and investment to places where the conditions are best for delivering their products and services anywhere on the globe. These developments have created (relative) winners and (relative) losers in societies all over the world in terms of job security, wages, social benefits, etc. (Frieden and Rogowski, 1996).

Politically, this has had three consequences for domestic politics. First, the differentiated patterns of winners and losers of globalization ensured that the salience of traditional left-right cleavages was reduced: globalization split the working class and created new social strata (Kriesi et al., 2008; 2012). It opened the door for left-wing populism to establish the notion of the global economy as the common man’s new enemy. Second, globalization made it more difficult for national governments to promote their citizens’ welfare: producers hopped between countries in search of the lowest production costs; currency crises in the 1990s (ERM crises 1992; Asian financial crisis 1998–1999) brought home the message that governments wanting to profit from global financial markets needed to surrender their freedom regarding monetary policy (Rodrik, 2000). This meant that it was harder for a country to build and defend a welfare state. Thus, some states turned to regional bodies to try to institutionalize social rights, in a regional block, within the context of globalization. The European Union is an extreme example of this pattern (Ross, 2006). A consequence of this shift has been a decrease in voters’ trust in national governments to deliver goods and services, spurring an interest in local governance and decentralization. In addition, it created an opportunity for political actors to mobilize voters against the transnational elite (be they managers of transnational corporations, financial speculators, or civil servants employed by international organizations). Third, globalization has put identity firmly on the political agenda, creating an environment in which the global, the national, and the local compete for loyalty, producing a debate on citizens’ identity. Whereas some manage to combine different identity pressures, others rally around a geographically narrowed identity. This offers fertile ground for those trying to locate the true people; hence, the territorial component (often national or local) attached to such efforts. All in all, globalization has produced a politically powerful sentiment: a feeling that the global economy produces new victims and villains, renders governments less powerful, and requires a new anchor in terms of identity. It is therefore
no surprise that globalization has functioned both as an opportunity structure and as material for the mobilization of left- and right-wing populism (e.g. Halikiopoulou et al., 2012; Harmsen, 2010; Mudde, 2007; Taggart, 1998; Vasilopoulou, 2011).

Regional Integration

Regional integration can be defined as a process in which national governments durably coordinate policies by being prepared to bear the short- and mid-term policy adjustment costs resulting from such coordination. Regional integration can remain strictly intergovernmental, but it can also involve the creation of a wider political-administrative system in which states pool their sovereignty (Keohane and Hoffmann, 1991) and accept a supranational legal system to ensure compliance. Through regional integration, often following existing trade patterns, states sought to strengthen their reduced steering capacity resulting from globalization. By opening up the economies of their region, yet tightening their borders within the wider global economy, states could profit from globalization and recapture some policy capacity. At the same time, such policy coordination meant that some groups in their own societies would bear the adjustment costs and that some steering capacity had to be transferred to the newly created regional level (cf. Scholte, 2005). Many regional integration schemes were reinforced or newly founded after the Cold War. The European integration project has developed the furthest in this regard, and it now involves regional integration that can be characterized as supranational in its economic and monetary dimensions.

This Janus-faced characteristic of regional integration has posed difficulties for national political parties, especially within the EU. First, it reinforces the debate over the proper locus of identity. Second, it opens up a debate regarding who belongs to the regional integration scheme and who does not. Third, it adds to the existing debate of winning or losing from globalization. Finally, it makes room for political parties that would assess the advantage of integration in terms of its consequences for the locality they seek to represent (e.g. Catalonia, Flanders, Padania). Together, these difficulties set the stage for populist parties that thrive on issues of inclusion and exclusion.

All in all, the end of the Cold War, globalization, and regional integration have thus changed the context in which day-to-day politics is currently played. They have contributed to the weakening of established parties and to the reduction of trust in national governments. International politics has thus contributed to a fundamentally different type of domestic politics. All these international developments thus create the conditions for a possible demand for populist parties and subsequently for these parties’ foreign policy positions.

Is There a Populist Foreign Policy?
Populism and Foreign Policy

As noted, the rise of populist parties follows important international developments: globalization, the end of the Cold War, and growth of regional organizations such as the EU. This brings populist parties, like all parties, to a fork in the road: because so many domestic issues now encompass international dimensions, populists have to take position in what Hanspeter Kriesi and his colleagues have defined as the new demarcation-integration cleavage (Kriesi et al., 2008; 2012). Kriesi and his colleagues argue that the traditional Rokkanian cleavages have been superseded by the demarcation-integration cleavage. As a result, voters increasingly align along the degree to which they support open or closed societies, regarding both the economic and the cultural dimension. This potential realignment subsequently forces parties to take positions on both the cultural and economic dimensions of an increasingly internationalized environment, which often boil down to decisions regarding open or closed economic or cultural borders. All parties thus have to take issue with the contrast between a more cosmopolitan outlook, emphasizing multiculturalism, and a more parochial outlook, emphasizing closed cultural and economic borders. In a sense, populist parties face a more difficult challenge than traditional parties because these international developments force them to define more explicitly who constitutes the pure people. In doing so, the attached ideology becomes important in determining the foreign policy of the populist party in question. Depending on their specific thin-centered ideology, populist parties may be expected to take a more open or protectionist view on trade and finance. However, a similar issue arises when looking at the cultural dimension: some populist parties, i.e., populist radical right parties, constrict the pure people to a cultural unit confined within a nation state. Other populist parties have a notion of the people that is not necessarily restricted to a territorial unit such as the nation state: left-wing populists identify with the exploited. Thus, as Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) note, left-wing populism tends to be inclusionary while right-wing populism tends to be exclusionary. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) base these conclusions on a comparison between left-wing populists in Latin America and right-wing populists in Europe. However, more recently, left-wing populists in Europe such as SYRIZA and Podemos also demonstrate that populists do not have to be exclusionary, given that both parties have a broader and more plural notion of the people (Kioupkiolis, 2016; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014).

We do not expect populist parties to take identical foreign policy positions. Rather, we expect them to differ in their foreign policy preferences because they will differ in their assessment of the impact that the international environment will have on their own understanding of who the pure people are. Below, we will discuss the foreign policy outlook of different populist parties on the basis of the demarcation-integration cleavage (Kriesi et al., 2008; 2012). This theoretical discussion is based on the most commonly cited populist parties in the literature, which can be categorized in the following way.

1. The radical right takes a nativist approach to the pure people. It includes the Italian Northern League (after the mid-1990s), the French National Front, the
Austrian Freedom Party, the Danish People’s Party, the Swiss People’s Party, Jobbik in Hungary, the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, and One Nation in Australia.

2. The market liberal creed locates the pure people in the honest, hardworking citizens who are endangered by the elite-run state. It encompasses Berlusconi’s Go Italy!, the Belgian List Dedecker, the Dutch List Pim Fortuyn, Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori in the 1990s, and the Liberal Party in Australia under John Howard.

3. The regionalists limit the pure people as historically belonging to a clear, smaller territorial unit. They are represented by the Italian Northern League and the Belgian Flemish Interest.

4. Left-wing populism sees the pure people as a specific social category not necessarily hemmed in by national borders. It incorporates Germany’s The Left, Greece’s SYRIZA, the Dutch Socialist Party, Spain’s PODEMOS, and Latin American parties led by leaders such as Chávez in Venezuela, Morales in Bolivia, and Correa in Ecuador.

Below, we will describe how these four populist types take positions on four issue domains that have become salient issues of foreign policy since 1990. We expect them to determine their positions on the basis of their conception of the pure people and their attaching ideology: their general attitude towards international politics, their position regarding global finance and trade, their position on transborder migration, and finally their stand on regional integration.

**General Outlook on International Politics**

It might be tempting to argue that all populists will be anti-cosmopolitan. However, this is not the case. In fact, it would be a mistake to simply equate populism with nationalism, isolationism, and protectionism. Because the concept of the pure people may or may not refer to a group residing within the borders of a sovereign state, populists may or may not be internationalist in orientation. Left-wing populists refer to the exploited generally, which can induce them not to ignore the internationalist solidarity dimension of foreign policy, e.g. in terms of supporting development aid and global policies that protect workers (via, for example, organizations such as the International Labour Organization).

In Latin America this left-wing internationalism takes on a specific angle: left-wing populists such as Morales define the pure people by encompassing indigenous people and by excluding from their identity any links with the old (European) colonizing powers or the newer imperialism of the United States. Chávez, on the other hand, associated the people with the Bolivarian revolutionary movement and the elites with serving American interests (Thies, 2014: esp. 11–13). This has resulted in an internationalist foreign policy of a specific type that is aimed at uniting Latin American countries against the United States, the international institutions the US built, the global economic policies the US espouses, and those countries in the region that remain close to the US. The Organization of American States (OAS) was viewed by Ecuador’s Rafael Correa as American-controlled, and its assessment of Ecuador’s civil rights situation prompted him to support the
Populism and Foreign Policy

The construction of rival international organizations (de la Torre and Ortiz Lemos, 2016: 2). The Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas (ALBA) is thus meant to serve as an institution to counter American power in the region (and to mobilize domestic support) and has even resulted in a closer relation between alliance members and the People’s Republic of China (Ellis, 2014: 49; Hawkins, 2016: 4–5). Similarly, Chávez created new regional institutions; for instance, the Spanish-language cable channel TeleSUR and a regional development bank, the Banco Sur (Hawkins, 2016: 14). Anti-Americanism can also be observed in populist parties such as Jobbik in Hungary, which seeks to establish strong ties with Russia and Iran. More mainstream and governmental parties such as FIDESZ pursue a softer line, but clearly deviate from the overall more pro-Atlantic attitude of the EU (Nagy et al., 2013: 235).

Likewise, populists who borrow from market liberalism tend to favor market economies because they consider the market economy to be beneficial to the people as they define the people (this is the case for populist parties in Australia and Canada): the elite, through state bureaucracy and support of special interest groups, prevented the people from reaping the fruits of a true market economy (Sawer and Laycock, 2009). Hence, there is relative sympathy towards economic multilateralism in parties such as Go Italy! in Italy; in neoliberal populists in Peru under Fujimori, Brazil under Collor, and Argentina under Menem; and in so-called market populists in Australia (Howard) and Canada (Harper) (Sawer and Laycock, 2009; Verbeek and Zaslove, 2015b; Wear, 2008; Weyland, 1999). Nevertheless, such multilateralism was also easily put aside once the national interest seemed to be at stake: Berlusconi’s governments never hesitated in defying western criticism and in concluding bilateral agreements, for example, with Libya (Verbeek and Zaslove, 2015b). Importantly, economic multilateralism is not always paralleled in other domains: Australia under Howard grew increasingly critical of the UN human rights system, especially the role of NGOs in that system, when the UN started monitoring Australian refugee policies (Sawer and Laycock, 2009: 146; Wear, 2008: 626–7).

The condemnation of the powerful state and the desire to protect the pure people need not go hand in hand with an internationalist outlook: the Tea Party in the US shows that populists may also decide that protectionism and even isolationism can be put forward as the proper foreign policy (Mead, 2011). This isolationist streak is also present in several populist parties that generally tend to oppose or be critical of military missions abroad, such as the Italian Northern League (Verbeek and Zaslove, 2015b). The attitude towards development aid depends on how the aid’s effects on the pure people are assessed: the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV) calls for a reduction in development aid (Partij voor de Vrijheid, 2010). However, the Italian Northern League argues that is it necessary to help people in their country of origin: this prevents migrants from coming to Europe and coincides with their claim of protecting their own pure people, i.e. Padanians and/or Italians. The infamous phrase of the party is aiutiamo i popoli a casa loro (Let’s help the people in their own country; Lega Nord, 2014).
Importantly, the end of the Cold War opened old diplomatic wounds dating back to the World Wars I and II that had remained hidden under the cloak of communism and East-West confrontation. The democratic transitions in Central and Eastern Europe allowed populist parties, in both the East and West, to play the nationalist card (Weyland, 1999: 383). The Austrian FPÖ used accession to the EU to demand that the Czech government repeal the so-called Beneš Decrees and that the Slovenian government repeal the so-called AVNOJ Mandates; demands that were meant to cater to the grievances of ethnic Germans who were expelled from these countries after 1945 (Heinisch, 2003: 106-7). Hungary’s Jobbik openly seeks to redraw the map of Europe and to incorporate the old territories Hungary lost in the Treaty of Trianon in 1923 (Nagy et al., 2013: 234).
## Populism and Foreign Policy

Table 20.1 Expected positions of populist parties on salient foreign policy issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Populist Radical Right</th>
<th>Populist Market Liberal</th>
<th>Populist Regionalist</th>
<th>Populist Left-Wing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General attitude</strong></td>
<td>Isolationist—opposed to multilateral deployment of the military</td>
<td>Economic cosmopolitan—open to multilateralism</td>
<td>Undefined—foreign policy should serve the region</td>
<td>Social cosmopolitan—international arrangements to protect the weak and to counter the existing hegemony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional (including European) integration</strong></td>
<td>Opposed to Europeanization</td>
<td>In favor of open market</td>
<td>Depending on how the EU affects their goals for more autonomy</td>
<td>Critical of Europeanization, but more willing to engage with international organizations than the PRR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trade and finance</strong></td>
<td>Protectionist</td>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Depending on whether globalization serves prosperity in the region</td>
<td>Protectionist because of labor displacement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transborder migration</strong></td>
<td>Opposed</td>
<td>Not necessarily opposed</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
<td>Not necessarily opposed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Populism and Foreign Policy

In sum, there is not a single populist foreign policy. Rather, we see a range of positions across populist types (see Table 20.1), ranging from isolationist policies to more open positions regarding cosmopolitanism or even a type of social cosmopolitanism. The differences among these positions depend in part on the relation between populism and the attaching ideology. Thus, the populist radical right tends to be more isolationist; the market liberals tend to be more open regarding cosmopolitanism and/or the market; and left-wing populists tend to have a more social cosmopolitan orientation, while favoring economic protection.

Transborder Migration

Currently, when we think of populism—in particular, European populism—migration is the first issue that comes to mind. There is no question that empirically immigration can be linked with populism, but it is linked with a specific type of populism: the populist radical right. Studies demonstrate that migration is one of the issues that matters most to populist radical right parties and their supporters (Ivarsflaten, 2008; Mudde, 2007; Van der Brug et al., 2005). Moreover, if one issue can be said to have prompted policy-making over the past thirty years, it would be migration. To be sure, it is difficult to trace the tangible effect of the populist radical right on immigration policy. Some scholars are sceptical of the impact of the radical right on immigration policies (Mudde, 2013), while others encourage us to also look to the role played by mainstream parties (Bale, 2008; Odmalm and Bale, 2015). On the surface, it does appear that migration policies in Western Europe have become stricter in the last decade. Although it might not be possible to trace the direct impact of the PRR on immigration, the PRR is part and parcel of the politicization of immigration.

One might wonder whether migration is a foreign policy issue. If a state’s foreign policy is about maintaining sovereign control over its territory, its migration policies regulate the size and nature of its population. Moreover, states have created various arrangements to address the transborder movement of individuals: states have acknowledged the rights of refugees via international treaties and are bound by them, and in economic integration schemes, states regulate foreigners’ access to the labor market. Migration policies thus belong to the core business of a state’s foreign policy. Consequently, populist parties that agitate against migration are attempting to affect a country’s foreign policy.

We can see the tangible influence of such parties on multilateral and bilateral policies: early on in Germany, for example, the rise of the Republikaner and violent attacks on migrants had an influence on German immigration policy as well as on the German government’s move to change European asylum law (Verbeek and Zaslove, 2015a). In the 2000s, the Italian government under Berlusconi struck bilateral agreements with Libya to limit migration (Verbeek and Zaslove, 2015b). To be sure, the changing discourse surrounding migration has also led to the securitization of immigration and the European borders. Sometimes this can be attributed to populists’ participation in government (or their support of a government); for instance, in Denmark. In other cases, the link is
indirect: the rising popularity of populist radical right parties has often permitted mainstream parties to become stricter on migration (Bale, 2003) not only in Europe but also in Australia, where the Howard government had to respond to the challenge of One Nation (Wear, 2008), and in the United Kingdom, where quarrels over migration seem to have spurred the Brexit group (Taub, 2016). Recently, these dynamics have played out within the context of the EU’s external policies: populists and the populist radical right have contributed to the discussion concerning Schengen (closing borders) in countries such as Denmark and France, while the European responses to the migration streams that began to emerge in Europe in 2015 have been influenced by radical opposition to migrants (for example, demonstrations in Germany by PEGIDA and protests against asylum centers in the Netherlands). Populist radical right parties in Central and Eastern Europe have influenced state reactions to the migration crisis, leading several governments (e.g. Hungary and Slovakia) to refuse to take in Islamic refugees. Countries such as Poland and Hungary have become sceptical of EU asylum policies, particularly burden sharing.

(p. 397) However, linking immigration with populism refers to a specific type of populist party. Thus, left-wing populist parties in Europe tend to be less anti-immigrant. Some parties, such as the Left Party in Germany and the Dutch Socialist Party, have at times made critical remarks regarding migration or have engaged in actions that could be interpreted as anti-immigrant (Furlong, 2005; Trouw, 2012); however, migration is not a core theme for these populist left-wing parties. This is even clearer for other populist left-wing parties such as PODEMOS in Spain or SYRIZA in Greece (Kioupkiolis, 2016; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014). In this regard, left-wing populist parties in Europe resemble left-wing parties in Latin America. Of course, in Latin America, migration is not as important an issue as it is in Europe. Importantly, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) argue that in Latin America, populists focus on economic issues and inclusion, while in Europe, (radical right) populists focus on culture and exclusion. Market liberal populist parties do not fully display the expected pattern: Berlusconi’s Go Italy! (until it joined a coalition with the Northern League in 2000) was not particularly concerned with immigration, owing in part to the fact that it was a populist liberal and not a populist radical right party (Zaslove, 2011). Yet, under populist and liberal Prime Minister John Howard Australia adopted strong policies to counter migration.

Again, we see a range of positions rather than a single perspective regarding foreign policy (cf. Table 20.1): the most distinct is the populist radical right, which embraces opposition to migration as its core position. For the other populist creeds, this is less clear. Both market liberal and regional populists do not necessarily oppose migration, although more often than not they are also sceptical of it. A clear example of the latter is the Northern League. In the early 1990s, when it was more of a regional populist than a populist radical right party, it was sceptical of migration but was not outright anti-immigrant (Zaslove, 2011). Finally, left-wing populists often do not oppose migration. Or, in cases in which left-wing populist parties are critical of immigration, they tend to be
milder than the populist radical right, often linking their claims with labor market issues rather than with cultural exclusion.

Trade and Finance

Populist parties will also take a different stance on economic issues depending on their attaching ideology. However, unlike migration, there tends to be more overlap between radical left and radical right populist movements with regard to the economy. Radical left and radical right populist movements both tend to oppose economic globalization (March, 2007; Mudde, 2007). In addition, populist radical left parties such as the Left Party in Germany, the Socialist Party in the Netherlands, and SYRIZA in Greece are also critical of EU integration, often linking the EU with neoliberalism and with the process of marketization. However, unlike with the populist radical right, there tends to be a willingness among the populist radical left to have a more constructive engagement with the EU (Die Linke, 2011; Socialistische Partij, 2012; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014). In Latin America, populist left parties oppose neoliberalism. Populist left-wing parties have been particularly successful in states that possess natural resources, taking advantage of their wealth (and a certain degree of economic independence) to oppose the neoliberal reforms. The populist left in countries such as Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador have used the monies received from natural resources to promise an alternative politics, an anti-austerity left-wing politics (Weyland, 2009).

If we return to our broader notion of foreign policy, we see that the discourse of populist parties could potentially play an important role in influencing foreign policy. The real effects are, however, more difficult to tangibly determine. Populist radical right parties such as the Dutch Party for Freedom, the Italian Northern League, and the Austrian Freedom Party appear on the surface to have affected EU integration policies via their impact on public opinion and the government coalitions of which they were part. However, in the end, their tangible influence is often not as significant as one might expect (for Italy, see Verbeek and Zaslove, 2015b). In contrast, left-wing populists such as SYRIZA in Greece, even while in power, were not able to push for an alternative to austerity measures. Perhaps oil-rich countries such as Venezuela have been more successful in steering their own course; for example, Chávez sought to forge an alliance of Latin American countries, seeking “to realize the Bolivarian Dream—the unification of Latin American countries under a single government that excluded the United States” (Hawkins, 2016: 255). Chávez attempted to create an alternative or even a counter hegemonic movement through his ALBA organization and already existing organizations such as Mercosur (Hawkins, 2016).

In sum, we again see various patterns (cf. Table 20.1): unsurprisingly, the PRR tends to be protectionist, while populist liberals favor an open economy. For regionalists, it is somewhat different: their position depends on whether they see globalization as a threat. A perfect example is the Northern League. In the early 1990s it was more in favor of open
borders, while in the later 1990s it began to demand more protectionist policies (Zaslove, 2011). Finally, the populist left’s protectionism is in part based on fear of labor displacement and its opposition to neoliberalism and globalization.

**Regional Integration**

It is often assumed that populists oppose regional integration. However, in reality, the views of populists towards regional integration can vary, while their tangible influence on regional integration is also uncertain. For example, we would expect populists to oppose MERCOSUR and the EU. This is in part true: populist radical right parties tend to be sceptical of EU integration on several fronts. They oppose the EU with regard to migration, they are often sceptical of economic integration and the loss of sovereignty and question the democratic legitimacy of the EU, while also opposing the bureaucratization of domestic politics (Liang, 2007b; Mudde, 2007). Indeed, Wilders’s PVV has called for the Netherlands to leave the EU (Partij voor de Vrijheid, 2012; NRC Handelsblad, 2016), while Nigel Farage’s UKIP was influential in the victory of the Brexit referendum in 2016. This is also true for right-wing populist parties in Central and Eastern Europe: FIDESZ in Hungary and PiS in Poland can be viewed as parties that are sceptical of the EU (Ágh, 2015). In addition, Berlusconi’s party Go Italy! demonstrated a high degree of scepticism towards EU integration, even though when push came to shove, the Berlusconi government complied with the EU and ratified the important measures (Verbeek and Zaslove, 2015b; Zaslove, 2011).

However, at the same time, it should be noted that the PRR has not always opposed European integration. In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, many PRR parties were in favor of European integration. For many PRR parties, the 1992 Maastricht Treaty was a turning point towards a more Euroskeptic position (Mudde, 2007). Still, this does not mean that all populist radical right parties oppose all aspects of the EU. PRR parties often see the advantage of the EU. Thus, the Italian Northern League called on the EU to invoke trade barriers against low-cost Chinese imports (Woods, 2009; Zaslove, 2011). Moreover, a number of PRR parties have attempted to facilitate a closer working relationship, focusing, for example, on controlling immigration, opposing terrorism and Islam, advocating for policies that support the family, and supporting a more social Europe (Liang, 2007b: 14), while more recently, several populist radical right parties have begun to collaborate in the European Parliament, forming the *Europe of Nations and Freedom* group (Paris and Holehouse, 2015; http://www.enfgroup-ep.eu/).

The picture regarding left-wing populism is similarly blurred. In Latin America, left-wing populists tend to be more sceptical of the market economy, but, at the same time, as noted above, they have also tried to work together to forge regional blocks that oppose neoliberalism. In Europe, the positions of left-wing populists are also ambiguous. Although they often perceive the EU to be linked with neoliberalism, parties such as
PODEMOS and even SYRIZA do not necessarily oppose the EU and regional integration; instead, they seek to propose an alternative EU.

If we turn to regional integration, we encounter patterns similar to those above (cf. Table 20.1). The populist radical right in most cases opposes regionalization. Populist liberals tend to favor regional integration insofar as it facilitates an open economy. The populist left tends to be critical of regional integration, although less so than the populist radical right. In some cases, i.e. in Latin America, there may even be attempts to forge counter hegemonic international alliances and institutions using international organizations. With regard to the populist regionalists, their position depends again on how regional integration affects their goal for regional autonomy.
Conclusion

The relationship between populism and foreign policy is dynamic: the changing nature of foreign policy, particularly after the Cold War, has created new opportunities for the rise of populist parties. Consequently, populist parties have had to develop their own foreign policies. The distinguishing feature of populist parties is the moral people/elite distinction. Determining a consistent populist foreign policy across all populist parties is difficult, however, given that it is the attaching ideology that often determines the specific foreign policy positions of the parties. Here, we have distinguished between four such populist variations: populist radical right; populist market liberal; populist regionalist; and populist left-wing. Still, they all judge foreign policy in terms of its effects on the elite-people juxtaposition. After all, this is what makes them a populist party. In some cases, this is manifested in the isolationist policy of the populist radical right, which entertains a narrow notion of the people; in other cases, it can take on the solidaristic internationalist cloak of the populist left parties, which seek to project a more encompassing notion of a people. In sum, international politics matters to populism, but the way it plays out differs across states and ideologies. Although all countries discussed here faced the triple challenge of the end of the Cold War, the advent of globalization, and the growth of regional organizations, populist parties have responded in different ways. We maintain that this variation is mainly caused by the thin-centered ideology of populism: it needs to seek an ideological bedfellow, the choice of which steers their position regarding international challenges and hence their foreign policy positions.

However, another plausible explanation presents itself, one that originates from populism’s basic distinction between the elite and the pure people: the prevailing international challenges offer an opportunity for populists to redefine or expand the notion of the corrupt elite; for example, the populist radical right tends to view the European elites in Brussels as their enemies, which influences their opposition to EU integration, financial open borders, and migration (insofar as these policy dimensions are often linked with EU integration). For the populist liberals, the elite is something else: the bureaucratic politician. If we turn to the populist regionalists, the elite is less obvious. It can be the dominant political parties, or it can be the bureaucrats in Brussels. For the populist left parties, the elites can be politicians within the state, but they can also be transnational financial elites or leaders of other countries who push for globalization. In sum, it appears that international events, through the need to formulate a foreign policy, may induce populists to rethink their notion of the elite, and hence the threat to the pure people.

The study of populism and foreign policy is an emerging field. It will require more empirical research on the effect of international politics on the fortunes of populists as well as the foreign policies these parties pursue. Here, we set out to delineate four different possible types of populist foreign policy. If we want to understand populists’ successes and failures in pursuing specific foreign policies, we need to incorporate the
Populism and Foreign Policy

impact of domestic political systems (cf. Kaarbo, 2012), as well as the dynamics of coalition politics (Verbeek and Zaslove, 2015b) and possibly agenda setting. Implementing this research agenda might bring comparative politics and international relations closer together.

References


Populism and Foreign Policy


Populism and Foreign Policy


Notes:

(1) Exceptions are: Liang, 2007a; Verbeek and Zaslove, 2015a; 2015b; Chryssogelos, 2010.

(2) See, for more information, the special issue edited by Taggart and Rovira Kaltwasser (2016) devoted to international and national responses to populists in government.

(3) The List Pim Fortuyn is a difficult case to classify. Given its strong anti-Islam position, it is often classified as a populist radical right party.

(4) The Northern League and the Flemish Interest are classified as populist, regionalist, and radical right. The Northern League, in particular, evolved in the mid-1990s from a populist regionalist to a populist radical right party.

(5) That leaves some mavericks that are more difficult to classify, such as Italy’s Five Star Movement and America’s (Republican) Tea Party.

Bertjan Verbeek
Bertjan Verbeek, Chair and Professor of International Relations, Department of Political Science, Institute for Management Research, Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Andrej Zaslove
Andrej Zaslove, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Radboud University, Institute for Management Research, Nijmegen, The Netherlands