Corso di Relazioni Internazionali

Populism and Foreign Policy

9 giugno 2020

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Lecture outline

1. Populism and foreign policy
2. The post-Cold War context and populism
3. Different types of populism and foreign policy
4. Populism in the Global South
5. Populists in power: effects on conflict, global governance and personalisation of policy making
Populism: definitions

Populist politics based on the dichotomy (pure) people/(bad) elites

E. Laclau: people and elites are ‘empty signifiers’, can be filled with meaning as populists wish (Ex.: For nationalists, the people are the ethnic nation)

Anti-elitism, anti-pluralism

Populist leaders claim to represent the people

Populism: a style, a discursive approach, a ‘thin-centred’ ideology to which ‘thick’ ideologies are attached (right, left)

In the Global North, populism is often associated with the radical right: Trump, Johnson, Orban, Salvini. More complexity in the Global South (Modi, Chavez..)

Left-wing populism also exists: Podemos, Syriza..
The impact of international politics on populism

Populism existed well before the 1990s (ex. Peronism in Latin America, L’Uomo Qualunque)

3 major transformations created the conditions for the rise of populism after the Cold War:

1) End of ideological blocs of the Cold War, neo(liberal) capitalist democracy as the only option – ‘TINA’ politics (There Is No Alternative)

→ corruption of the establishment, erosion of the welfare state leads to pressure to repoliticise certain topics
The impact of international politics on populism

2) Economic and financial globalisation leads to (relative) winners and losers, weakening of the national welfare state, delocalisation of firms

→ this creates opportunities especially (but not only) for left-wing movements

→ opposition against transnational global elites

→ job insecurity and immigration exploited by right-wing populists, identity questions back on the political agenda
The impact of international politics on populism

3) Regional integration (European Union)
Transfer of competences at EU level (to an intransparent elite), according to (neo)liberal doctrines
→ calls for renationalisation or policies, for a return to national identities (right-wing) or for a ‘Social Europe’ or a return to the national welfare state (left-wing)
Is there a populist foreign policy?

There are some common features: centralised and personalised decision-making, diversification of foreign relations (multipolarity).

..But much depends on the attached ‘thick ideology’. Examples:

- Views on trade and finance
- Inclusiveness of ‘the people’ and views on immigration
- Views of USA/West and of other actors (China/Russia)

On these questions, the left/right ideology can be decisive

Moreover, there are always country-specific factors that affect foreign policy together with ideologies
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Populist Radical Right</th>
<th>Populist Market Liberal</th>
<th>Populist Regionalist</th>
<th>Populist Left-Wing</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General attitude</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>
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<tr>
<td>Region (including European) integration</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>
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<tr>
<td>Trade and finance</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>Transborder migration</td>
<td>Opposed</td>
<td>Not necessarily opposed</td>
<td>Unclear</td>
<td>Not necessarily opposed</td>
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Populism in the Global South

Most widely discussed cases in recent literature: Trump, Brexit, Italy (Berlusconi, League-Five Star government), Hungary and Poland

→ negative impact on multilateral institutions, climate change negotiations; erratic behaviour, conflict-prone internationally..

But there are numerous examples in the Global South:
- Narendra Modi, India’s Prime Minister
- Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey’s President
- Rodrigo Duterte, Philippines’ President
- Hugo Chavez, former President of Venezuela
Narendra Modi, India

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in power since 2014

Thick ideology: Hindu nationalism

Opposed elite: previous Indian National Congress governments, Pakistan

Anti-pluralism against Muslim and other minorities

‘Mixed’ foreign policy: border agreement with Bangladesh, expansion of partnerships with Muslim countries BUT anti-Pakistan policy

No anti-Americanism, distancing from Nehruvian anti-imperialism and non-aligned movement, but upheld commitment to the UN, joined SCO
Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey

Justice and Development Party (AKP), President since 2014

Thick ideology: Islamism

Opposed elites: Kemalist and Gulenist elites

Anti-pluralism: against democratic institutions, Kurds

Foreign policy: resecuritisation, erratic and worsening relations with US and EU, focus on the Middle East (Syrian civil war), partial rapprochement with Russia (since 2016)

Use of Turkish diasporas (in Germany) for FP (included in ‘the people’)

NB: hostile EU attitude to Turkey (candidate for membership since 1999)
Rodrigo Duterte, Philippines

President since 2016
Thick ideology: unclear, mixed right- and left-wing ideas
Opposed to preexisting elites (‘Imperial Manila’), drug dealers

Foreign policy: distancing from the US, realignment with China, rapprochement with Russia
Multilateralism: opposed to EU and UN (after they criticised his ‘war on drugs’), but not to ASEAN
Erratic approach to climate change, but he eventually supported the Paris agreement
Hugo Chavez, Venezuela

President 1999-2013

Thick ideology: Bolivarianism Latin American socialism

Opposed elite: US imperialist elites, pro-US elites in Venezuela

Anti-pluralism: limitations imposed on opposition

Foreign policy: opposed US and US-led regional organisations (OAS) but promoted alternative institutions such as ALBA (Alianza Bolivariana para America)

Supportive of global governance to fight climate change
Assessing populist leaders’ foreign policy in Global South

Centrality of the populist leader in FP
Some are more conflict-prone (Erdogan), for others the evidence is not very strong
No automatic rejection of international institutions (ex. Modi’s commitment to UN) and promotion of other forms of regional governance (Venezuela/ALBA)
Marginalisation of previous foreign policy establishment
Differentiation of foreign relations – usually away from the West (Chavez, Duterte, Erdogan), but not always/fully (Modi) → This reflects multipolar world and growing relevance of South-South relations