

Populism Variance: To the Left or Right?

by Richard A. Scroggins

Much of the scholarly debate regarding populism has argued that it emerges from strong anti-elitism and strong base ideas such as nationalism or anti-immigration. Contrary to this, Ernesto Laclau in *On Populist Reason* (2005), and in later essays with Chantal Mouffe, argues that populism, rather than relying on a base set of ideas like the aforementioned, instead, is the presentation of a power struggle between an underdog and a dominant power. Laclau furthers this assertion by stating that this power dynamic that is created can be manipulated and executed from either a left- or right-wing perspective utilizing demands that create a narrative for the power struggle, resulting in a variety of ways populism can rise. This paper aims to explore under what conditions populism exists in a country, and what factors are present to cause a country to produce a strong left- or right-wing populist group. This research is conducted utilizing the Varieties of Democracies (VDem) data sets, in order to code for populist parties in democracies, as well as scale their populist value type and strength. Once identified and scaled, the data used is backed up by an extensive literature review detailing prominent variables within social, economic, and political dynamics. The expected findings for this research are that certain variables such as income inequality are very significant when populist movements begin, but it is the context of a country's history, or the current prominent issues at hand for a country, such as immigration or austerity, that is dominant factor in dictating what type of populism can thrive.