

Are the media reflective or constitutive of populist discourses? An interdisciplinary symposium on the interplay between media and populism



Symposium on Media and Populism, Madrid, 4-5 November 2019

Populism has become a hotly debated topic across the social sciences. The success of populist parties and populist leaders has become a source of concern for those who defend a liberal model of representative democracy. The label “populism” has been applied to different events and phenomena in contemporary politics, including (but not reduced to) Bolsonaro’s and López Obrador electoral victories in Brazil and México, Maduro’s government in Venezuela, Donald Trump’s presidency in the US, the campaign and the result of the EU referendum in the UK, or the rise of Podemos and Vox in Spain, Syriza in Greece, or Cinque Stelle in Italy. Unfortunately, and despite the increasing number of publications on the subject, there are still many areas of the populist phenomenon which remain unexplored and others in which scholarly disagreements have hindered cumulative knowledge (Bonikowski and Gidron 2016, De la Torre and Mazzoleni 2019). Even the mainstream media are exploring the extent to which ‘populism’ is a/the defining trait of contemporary politics (e.g. the Guardian’s ‘The New Populism’ series, published in 2019).

The purpose of this symposium is to shed some light on the interplay between the (traditional and new) media and the emergence of populism, adopting an interdisciplinary approach. We will deconstruct the concept of populism and discuss approaches to operationalise it for research purposes. We will explore the normalisation of illiberal and exclusionary discourses (including those against migrants and LGBTQ), as well as the mechanisms through which they are disseminated widely. Fake news and the instrumentalisation of journalism will be also covered. Although most of the discussions will be focused on the “supply side” of populism, namely communications and narratives by parties and leaders and how they are reflected in the media, we will also try to approach the “demand side”, this is, the beliefs and attitudes which make the populist narrative successful.

Participants in the symposium are invited to present papers, drafts or preliminary research ideas on the topic. Comparative and case specific contributions are welcome. This will also be an opportunity to discuss a proposal for a special issue and/or an edited volume, as well as to establish research collaborations across scholarly disciplines (political science, media studies, sociology, psychology, etc.). The presentations and discussions will take place at the Department of Political Science and Administration of the National Distance Education University (UNED) in Madrid on the 4 November 2019. We will conduct some follow up work sessions during the 5 November 2019.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for any further query concerning the symposium:
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Monday 4 November 2019

10-10:30 Welcome to participants



Session 1: 10:30 – 12:15

Deconstructing and comparing populism: a new five-dimensional framework, Jose Javier Olivas Osuna, UNED

In defence of Populism: issues of representation, Marina Prentoulis, University of East Anglia

Brexit the media and the people: a victory of populism? Iñaki García Blanco, Cardiff University

Session 2: 12:30 – 14:00

Social networks and populism in the EU Analysis of the communication of the French far-right wing in the 2014-2019 elections Uxia Carral Vilar, Carlos Ill

Pharmaceutical populism. Why giving power to patients may destroy some public goods, David Teira Serrano, UNED

Whose freedom, and from what? The child as cipher for a populist politics of ‘traditional values’, Maria Brock, Birkbeck, University of London

Session 3: 16:00 – 17:45

Populism, nationalism and the global other, Maria Kyriakidou, Cardiff University

Left Populism in Europe, Marina Prentoulis, University of East Anglia

Populism and the Persistence of Misinformation, Nina Wiesehomeier, Instituto de Empresa

Tuesday 5 November 2019

Work sessions from 10:30 – 17:00

Preparation for future research and collaboration. We will discuss a proposal for a special issue and/or edited volume, a follow up symposium in 2021, and several research collaborations. We will follow up some of the emerging arguments from the first day and see how they could be further explored.

Other research questions we will address:

- Are media reflective or constitutive of populist discourses?
- What are people’s motives to share fake news? Is belief a necessary condition for sharing?
- How does media contribute to ‘othering’ and antagonistic narratives?
- Framing differences: how to analyse non textual sources
- What is the role of the media monitoring populist leaders? And that of academic monitoring the media?
- ‘Othering’ through gender
- How do populists use the concept of borders and to what extent conceptions of borders reflect a populist logic of articulation?