

POPULISM & CRISIS

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Course Description

Recent years have witnessed the rise of the word “populism” to the centre of political discussions across the globe. Yet, the longstanding and diversified body of scholarly work on this topic may seem unwieldy, making first encounters with it particularly challenging. What is populism? How does it affect political dynamics and electoral competition? And why parties and political entrepreneurs that we understand as populists regularly succeed in moments of crisis?

The mission of this course is to accompany students in trying to answer these questions by presenting state of the art research on populism’s origins, workings, and consequences. We adopt a multidisciplinary approach, considering research conducted in political science, sociology, and economics, and discussing the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative approaches. We consider how populism gets declined in its variants from the left to the right of the political spectrum and in different historical and geographical context in the Global North and South.

The course is also intended to train students to manage a research project through all the phases from conception to publication. Presentations of cutting-edge research on the subject from Bocconi scholars will complement lectures from the course’s instructors and students’ presentations.

Course Objectives

Knowledge & Understanding

During this course successful students will acquire knowledge and understanding of:

1. The key theories trying to understand and explain the role of populism in politics;
2. The historical details of and the scholarly debate on exemplary cases of populist successes and failures around the world;
3. The state-of-the-art empirical research on the causes, workings, and consequences of populism.

Transferable Skills

After successful completion of this course students will be able to:

1. Use the theoretical and empirical insights presented during the course to conduct independent research on the behaviour of citizens, politicians and other political actors in the emergence of populist movements and parties, in particular, in the event of economic crises;

2. Use the multi-disciplinary and multi-method research tools presented during the course to conduct independent research on political dynamics;
3. Use the skills developed in the hands-on part of the project to navigate the complexities inherent in conducting and publishing independent research.

Course Structure

The course is structured in five blocks. The first block focuses on defining populism and introduces key cases from different world areas and historical moments. The third and fourth block present and discuss state-of-the-art empirical research on populism. The fifth block introduces different research approaches to the study of populism and trains students to design and independent research project. The sixth block discusses the consequences of populism. The last week of the course is dedicated to students' own research design presentations.

Block 1: Conceptualization

Block 2: Causes of Populism

Block 3: How Populism Works

Block 4: Research Design & Example

Block 5: Consequences of Populism

Block 6: Presentation Week & Wrap Up

Required Materials

In the field of populism research in which the topics addressed are broad, and thus defy easy summary, major contributions are, and will likely be made, in books. That is not to say that shorter academic journal articles are not important, we will read many of them, but we will also focus on several book chapters throughout this course. The book chapters will be made available via the Blackboard course page. All peer-reviewed journal articles should be readily available online through the library. The easiest way to find them is to follow the link in this syllabus. Any readings not readily accessible online will be available on Blackboard. The required reading should be read before the class. Before the class starts, we would advise every student to acquire and read: Mudde, Cas and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) [Populism: A Very Short Introduction](#). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

A detailed reading list will be made publicly available a few weeks before the course starts.

Attendance

Some of the assigned readings will feature a high degree of knowledge and sophistication in terms of theories and methods of analysis. Therefore, students' attendance is strongly recommended. The sessions will provide students some background that will help them gain a better understanding of the readings.

Before attending class, all students are required to have read the required reading and read the news article or listened to the podcast. Please come to each class with discussion questions regarding the readings and podcasts.

Attendance will be recorded and the attendance rate is expected to be equal to or higher than 75%.

Assessments

With the purpose of measuring the acquisition of the learning outcomes, the student assessment is based on three main components, 1) a reading material presentation, 2) a research design presentation and 3) a written assignment. The reading material presentation accounts for 10 per cent of the grade, the research design presentation for 30 percent and the final assignment for 60 per cent of the final grade.

1) Reading material preparation (10 %): The reading material presentation is designed to briefly summarize the main readings and apply the readings to current events. Each student must give one reading material presentation. In the presentation students can use the week's required reading, the newspaper article or podcast and search for practical examples that help illustrate the reading from political life across the globe. A newspaper article or podcast is provided to introduce students to the topics, but students are encouraged to use additional materials and examples. Students can sign up for presentations at the beginning of the semester via a sign-up sheet on Blackboard.

2) Research design preparation (30 %): During the workshop weeks of the class, students are expected to apply the class materials to their own research interests. In this presentation, they are asked to develop a research puzzle, research question, core hypothesis, operational definitions of key terms and research design that can help tackle the research question. The research question can be on any topic discussed in class and should form the basis for the final assignment. Students can sign up for presentations at the week before the workshop weeks of class via a sign-up sheet on Blackboard.

3) Final assignment (60 %): Students will end the class by handing in a final assignment in which they discuss research puzzle, research question, core hypothesis, operational definitions of key terms and research design that can help tackle the research question. It will pretty much serve as a pre-analysis plan (PAP) for a paper. The instructions about how to write a PAP and other formatting details will be discussed during the workshop weeks of class.

Instructions for presentations:

Students can present during the class, or pre-record their presentations using LaTeX/Power Point, Kaltura or any other suitable recording tool. The presentations should be approx. 5-7 minutes long using a maximum of 5 slides. The sign-up sheet circulated after the first course meeting for all groups to sign up for a presentation.

Ideally, the presentations should be intellectually stimulating – don't be boring! LaTeX/Power Point are good softwares for preparing your slides; you do not need anything fancier. Your font size should be big enough to read and your slides must look professional and be readable.

Follow these rules when preparing your slides:

1. Use the "slide master" feature to create a consistent and simple design template. It is fine to vary the content presentation (bulleted list, two-column text, text and image, etc.), but be consistent with other elements such as font, colors and background.
2. Empty space on the slide will enhance readability.
3. Simplify and limit the number of words on each screen. Use key phrases and include only essential information. Do not add long quotes or blocks of text.
4. Avoid the use of flashy transitions (such as text fly-ins) and special effects (like animation or sounds). These features seem impressive or cute at first but get old quickly.

5. Use good-quality images that reinforce and complement your message. Ensure that your image maintains its impact and resolution when projected on a larger screen.

Course Policies

During Class

All required readings should be completed, all news articles must be read and podcasts must be listened to prior to attending the classes. During class it is important to be fully present, so phones are prohibited as they are not useful for anything in the course. Laptops are allowed but only for taking notes, not for any other use.

Academic Integrity and Honesty

Students are required to comply with the university policy on academic integrity found in the Code of Academic Integrity for Bocconi Students found here: [Code of Conduct for the Bocconi Students](#). We urge you all to not cheat, it affects everyone in class and at the university.

Accommodations for Diversity

Being part of the Bocconi community, means sharing its values: independence, ethics, transparency, freedom of expression, equality, solidarity, promotion of diversity, attention to merit and development of individual abilities, professionalism and standards, social responsibility. Please acquaint yourself with the Honor Code for the Bocconi Community using the following link: [Honor Code for the Bocconi Community](#). We are committed to maintain an academic environment for all students that is free from all forms of discrimination based on race, religion, gender, national origin, age, disability or sexual orientation. If you feel uncomfortable at any time during class, please feel free to get in touch with Prof De Vries. In addition, any person who feels that they have been the subject of prohibited discrimination, harassment, or retaliation should contact the Student Ombudsman at garante.studenti@unibocconi.it.

Course Schedule

1. Tuesday, October 21, 14.45-16.00: Conceptualization: What is Populism?
2. Tuesday, October 21, 16:30-18.15: Conceptualization: Populism as an Umbrella Concept
3. Wednesday, October 22, 14.45-16.00: Causes: Material Explanations
4. Wednesday, October 22, 16:30-18.15: Causes: Communal Explanations
5. Tuesday, October 28, 14.45-15.30: Workings: Supply Side
6. Tuesday, October 28, 15.45-17.00: Workings: Demand Side
7. Wednesday, October 29, 08.30-09.45: Workshop I: Research Example
8. Wednesday, October 29, 10.15-11.45: Workshop II: Research Design Reflection
9. Tuesday, November 4, 14.45-16.00: Consequences: Economy
10. Tuesday, November 4, 16:30-18.15 Consequences: Bureaucracy

11. Wednesday, November 5, 08.30-09.45:: Presentation Week & Wrap Up
12. Wednesday, November 5, 10.15-11.45: Presentation Week & Wrap U

Block 1: Conceptualization

Session 1: What is Populism?

Required Readings

Isaiah Berlin 1967 *To Define Populism*. [from par. 136 (page 5)] [[Link](#)]

Mudde C (2004) The Populist Zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition* 39, 541–563.

Caramani, Daniele (2017) Will vs. reason: The Populist and Technocratic Forms of Political Representation and Their Critique to Party Government. *American Political Science Review*, 111.1: 54-67.

Other Readings

Aslanidis P (2016) Is Populism an Ideology? A Refutation and a New Perspective. *Political Studies* 64, 88–104.

Brubaker, Rogers (2017) “Why Populism?” *Theory and Society* 46 (5): 357–85.

Roberts KM (2006) Populism, Political Conflict, and Grass-Roots Organization in Latin America. *Comparative Politics* 38, 127–148.

Weyland K (2001) Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics. *Comparative Politics* 34, 1–22.

Rueda, Daniel (2021) “Is Populism a Political Strategy? A Critique of an Enduring Approach.” *Political Studies* 69 (2): 167–84.

Session 2: Populism as an Umbrella Concept

Required Readings

Hunger, Sophia, and Fred Paxton (2022) “What’s in a Buzzword? A Systematic Review of the State of Populism Research in Political Science.” *Political Science Research and Methods* 10 (3): 617–33.

Peters, B. Guy, and Jon Pierre (2020) “A Typology of Populism: Understanding the Different Forms of Populism and their Implications.” *Democratization* 27 (6): 928–46.

Art, David (2022) “The Myth of Global Populism.” *Perspectives on Politics* 20 (3): 999–1011.

Mudde, Cas. 2017. “Why Nativism, Not Populism, Should Be Declared Word of the Year.” *The Guardian*, December 7, 2017. [[Link](#)]

Other Readings

Mudde, Cas, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America.” *Government and Opposition* 48 (2): 147–74.

Mudde C and Rovira Kaltwasser C (2018) Studying Populism in Comparative Perspective: Reflections on the Contemporary and Future Research Agenda. *Comparative Political Studies* 51, 1667–1693.

- Ivaldi G, Lanzone ME and Woods D (2017) Varieties of Populism across a Left-Right Spectrum: the Case of the Front National, the Northern League, Podemos and Five Star movement. *Swiss Political Science Review* 23, 354–376.
- Sartori, G. (1970), ‘Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics’, *American Political Science Review*, 64(4): 1033–53.

Block 2: Causes

Session 3: Material Explanations

Required Readings

- Berman, Sheri 2022. The Causes of Populism in the West, *Annual Review of Political Science* 24:71-88.
- Kurer, T., & Van Staaldin, B. (2022). “Disappointed Expectations: Downward Mobility and Electoral Change.” *American Political Science Review*, 116(4):1340-1356.
- Colantone, Italo, and Piero Stanig. 2019. “The Surge of Economic Nationalism in Western Europe.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33 (4): 128–51.
- Guiso, Luigi, Helios Herrera, Massimo Morelli, and Tommaso Sonno. 2019. “Global Crises and Populism: The Role of Eurozone Institutions.” *Economic Policy* 34 (97): 95–139.

Other Readings

- Funke, Manuel, Moritz Schularick, Christoph Trebesch (2016) Going to Extremes: Politics After Financial Crises, 1870–2014, *European Economic Review* 88: 227-260,
- Anelli, Colantone, Stanig, 2021. “Individual Vulnerability to Industrial Robot Adoption Increases Support for the Radical Right.” *PNAS*
- Fetzer, Thiemo. 2019. “Did Austerity Cause Brexit?” *American Economic Review* 109 (11): 102.
- Rodrik, Dani. 2021 “Why Does Globalization Fuel Populism? Economics, Culture, and the Rise of Right-Wing Populism,” *Annual Review of Political Science*

Session 4: Communal Explanations

Required Readings

- Margalit, Yotam. 2019. “Economic Insecurity and the Causes of Populism, Reconsidered.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33 (4): 152–70.
- Hangartner, Dominik, Elias Dinas, Moritz Marbach, Konstantinos Matakos, and Dimitrios Xefteris. 2019. “Does Exposure to the Refugee Crisis Make Natives More Hostile?” *American Political Science Review* 113 (2): 442–55.
- Bolet, D. (2021). Drinking Alone: Local Socio-Cultural Degradation and Radical Right Support—The Case of British Pub Closures. *Comparative Political Studies*, 54(9), 1653–1692.
- Caramani, Daniele & Manucci, Luca (2019) National Past and Populism: The Re-Elaboration of Fascism and its Impact on Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe. *West European Politics* 42 (6).

Other Readings

- Gidron, Noam, and Peter A. Hall. 2017. "The Politics of Social Status: Economic and Cultural Roots of the Populist Right." *The British Journal of Sociology* 68 (S1): S57–84.
- Inglehart, Ronald, and Pippa Norris. 2019. *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit and Authoritarian Populism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Cramer Walsh, Katherine. 2012. "Putting Inequality in Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective." *American Political Science Review* 106 (3): 517–32.

Block 3: Workings

Session 5: Supply Side

Required Readings

- Lamont, Michèle, Bo Yun Park, and Elena Ayala-Hurtado. 2017. "Trump's Electoral Speeches and His Appeal to the American White Working Class." *The British Journal of Sociology* 68 (S1): S153–80.
- McDonnell, D., & Ondelli, S. (2022). The Language of Right-Wing Populist Leaders: Not So Simple. *Perspectives on Politics*, 20(3), 828-841.
- Garrido, Marco. 2017. "Why the Poor Support Populism: The Politics of Sincerity in Metro Manila." *American Journal of Sociology* 123 (3): 647–85.
- De Vries, Catherine E., and Sara B. Hobolt. *Political Entrepreneurs*. Princeton University Press. Ch 5-6.

Other Readings

- Buggle, Johannes C., Vlachos, Stephanos. 2022. *Populist Persuasion in Electoral Campaigns: Evidence from Bryan's Unique Whistle-Stop Tour*. Working Paper
- Scrinzi, Francesca (2016). "A 'New' National Front? Gender, Religion, Secularization and the French Populist Radical Right". In Köttig, Michaela, Bitzan, Renate, Andrea Petö, *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*, Palgrave.
- Schaub, Max, and Davide Morisi. 2020. "Voter Mobilisation in the Echo Chamber: Broadband Internet and the Rise of Populism in Europe." *European Journal of Political Research*, February, 1475-6765.

Session 6: Demand Side

Required Readings

- Marcos-Marne, Hugo, Gil de Zúñiga, Homero, Borah, Porismita (2023) "What do we (not) know about demand-side populism? A systematic literature review on populist attitudes." *European Political Science*, 22, 293–307.
- Rooduijn Matthijs (2018) "What unites the voter bases of populist parties? Comparing the electorates of 15 populist parties." *European Political Science Review* 10, 351–368.
- Schumacher, Gijs, Matthijs Rooduijn, and Bert N. Bakker. 2022. "Hot Populism? Affective Responses to Antiestablishment Rhetoric." *Political Psychology* 43 (5): 851–71

Other Readings

- Durante, Ruben, Paolo Pinotti, and Andrea Tesei. 2019. "The Political Legacy of Entertainment TV." *American Economic Review* 109 (7): 2497–2530.
- Havlík V and Voda P (2018) Cleavages, protest or voting for hope? The rise of centrist populist parties in the Czech Republic. *Swiss Political Science Review* 24, 161–186.
- Noury, Abdul, and Gerard Roland. 2020. "Identity Politics and Populism in Europe." *Annual Review of Political Science* 23: 421–39

Block 4: Research Design and Example

Session 7: Moving from Puzzle to a Research Design

- Freedman, David A. (1991) "Statistical Models and Shoe Leather." *Sociological Methodology*: 291–313.
- Blattman, Christopher (2012) Children and War: How “Soft” Research Can Answer the Hard Questions in Political Science. *Perspectives on Politics* 10.2: 403–413.
- King, Gary (2006). Publication, Publication. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 39(1), 119–125.
- Stimson, James A. *Professional Writing in Political Science: A Highly opinionated Essay* [especially the part on “problem”] [[Link](#)]
- De Vries, Catherine E. (2025) *You Don’t Need More Ideas. You Need a Better Question* [[Link](#)] / *Sherlock at the Brickyard: On Clues, Chaos, and Construction* [[Link](#)]

Session 8: Research Example by Cremaschi et al.

- Cremaschi, Simone, Paula Rettl, Marco Cappelluti, and Catherine E. De Vries (2024) *Geographies of Discontent: How Public Service Deprivation Increased Far-right Support in Italy*. *American Journal of Political Science*. [[Link](#)]

Block 5: Consequences

Session 9: Economy

Required Readings

- Born, B, G J Müller, M Schularick and P Sedlacek (2019), “The Cost of Economic Nationalism: Evidence from the Brexit Experiment”, *Economic Journal* 129 (623): 2722–2744.
- Funke, M, M Schularick and C Trebesch (2020), “Populist Leaders and the Economy”, *American Economic Review* 113(12): 3249–88.
- Guriey, Sergei, and Elias Papaioannou (2022) The Political Economy of Populism. *Journal of Economic Literature*, v. 60, no. 3, pp. 753–832.

Session 10: Government

Bellodi et al. (2022) The Costs of Populism for the Bureaucracy and Government Performance: Evidence from Italian Municipalities, *American Journal of Political Science* forthcoming.

Bauer, Michael W, and Stefan Becker. 2020. “Democratic Backsliding, Populism, and Public Administration.” *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance* 3 (1): 19–31.

De Vries, Catherine E. and Sara B. Hobolt. *Political Entrepreneurs*. Princeton University Press. Ch. 8.

Block 6: Presentations & Wrap Up

Session 11: Research Design Presentations

Session 12: Research Design Presentations