



WHY SHOULD WE STUDY POPULISM?

Cas Mudde

SPIA at University of Georgia

C-REX at University of Oslo



1. BECAUSE POPULISM IS EVERYWHERE (AT LEAST IN THE PUBLIC DEBATE)

THE JORDAN TIMES

[Home](#) [Local](#) [Region](#) [World](#) [Business](#) [Sports](#) [Features](#)

[Home](#) » [Opinion](#) » [Jorge G. Castañeda](#) » The tides of Latin American populism

The tides of Latin American populism

Jan 07, 2016 - Last updated at Jan 07, 2016



REUTERS

EDITION: [U.S.](#)

[HOME](#) [BUSINESS](#) [MARKETS](#) [WORLD](#) [POLITICS](#) [TECH](#) [OPINION](#) [BREAKINGVIEWS](#)

Bank of America

The conversation's heating up in D

Breakingviews

European populism poised for troubling second wave

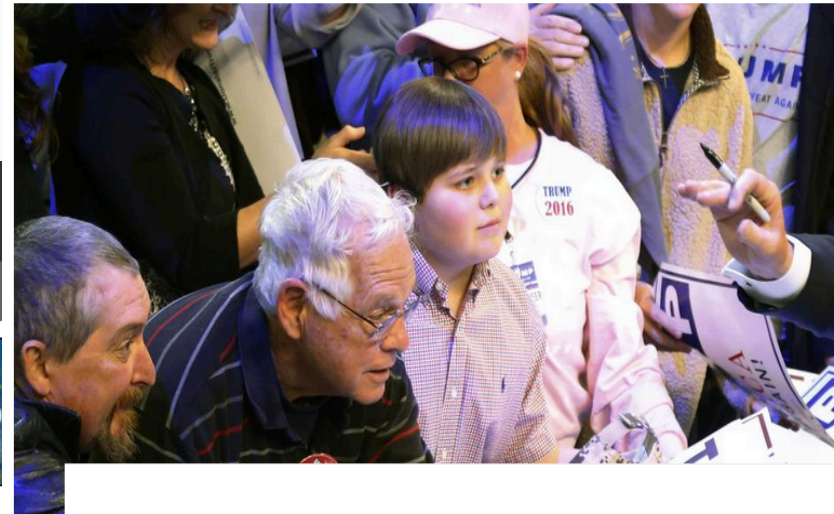
By [Fiona Maharg-Bravo](#) | December 31, 2015

RealClear [Politics](#)

[Polls](#) [Election 2016](#)

NOW READING: [IT'S AN ERA OF ANGRY POPULISM AND NO ONE IS IMMUNE](#)

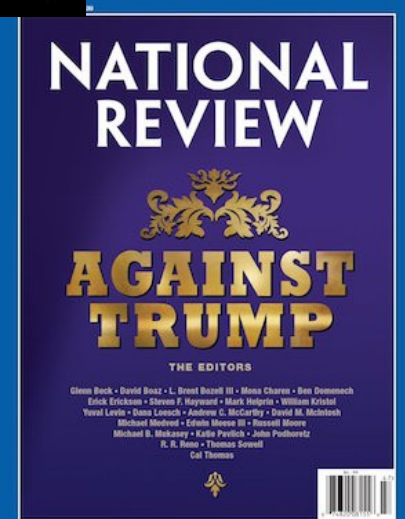
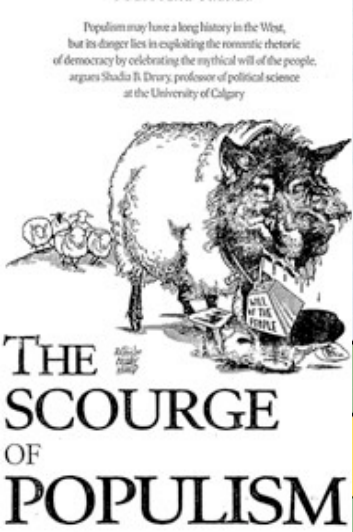
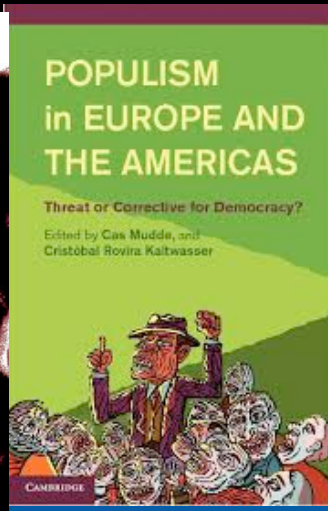
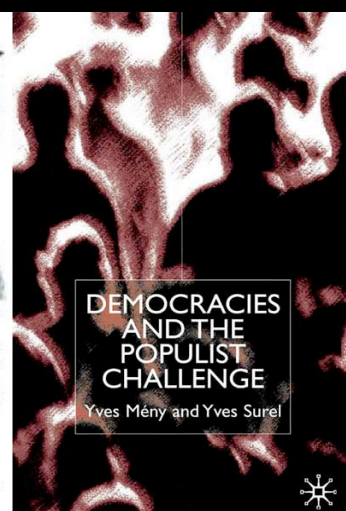
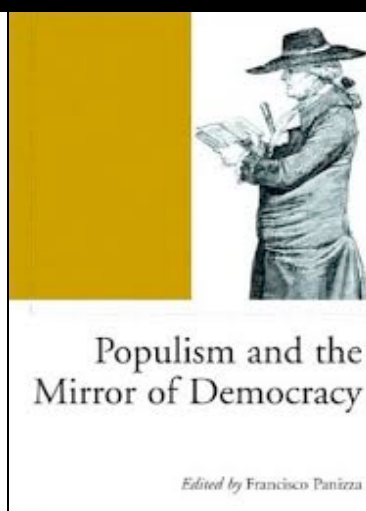
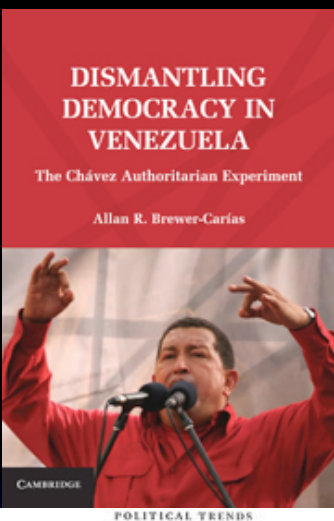
UP NEXT: [THE WHOLE GOP GOES ROGUE](#)



It's an Era of Angry Populism and No One Is Immune



2. BECAUSE POPULISM IS CONSIDERED TO BE DANGEROUS FOR DEMOCRACY



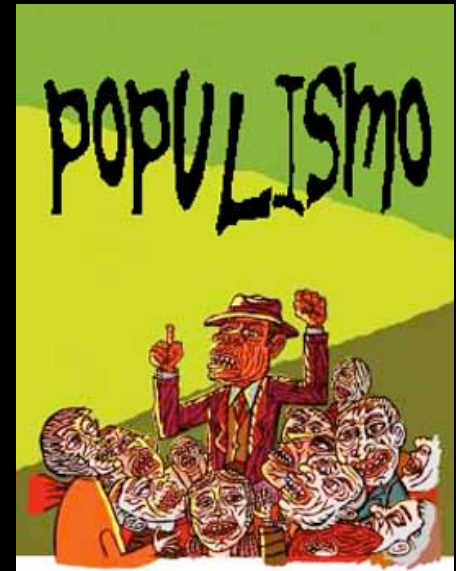
QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

- (1) **What** is populism?
- (2) **Who** are the populists?
- (3) How **popular** are populists?
- (4) What are the **causes** of populist mobilization?
- (5) What are the **consequences** of populist politics for democracy?



WHAT IS POPULISM?

“Populism is a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté general* (general will) of the people.”



POPULISM AND DEMOCRACY

Populism is **pro**-democracy, but **anti-liberal** democracy.

It can be left or right, depending on the '**host ideology**' of the populist actor.

Today it is more left-wing in the **South** and more right-wing in the **North** -- in both Europe and the Americas.



POPULISM IN THE WORLD

North America: deep and long roots in society, but only episodic political success.

South America: three waves since early 20th century (Perón – Fujimori – Chávez).

- **Europe:** from marginal agrarians in Eastern Europe to “populist zeitgeist” in EUrope.

Rest of World: still relatively limited but growing in importance and scope.

CAUSES:

Why is populism successful (now)?

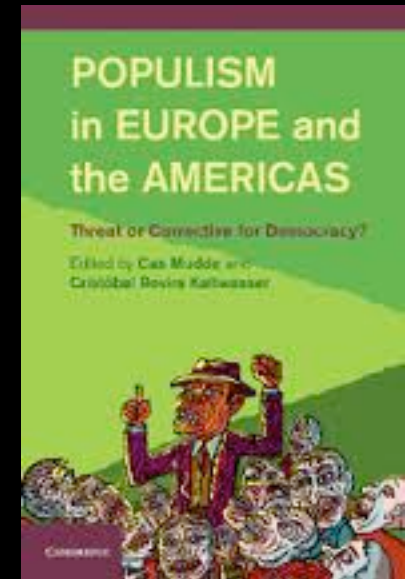
- (1) Important **issues** are not (adequately) addressed by elites.
- (2) **Elites** are perceived as being “all the same.”
- (3) **People** have more efficacy (“cognitive mobilization”).
- (4) **Populist actors** are “attractive.”
- (5) **Media** structure is more favorable.



CONSEQUENCES:

Effects of populism on liberal democracy?

- (1) **Re-politicization** of certain issues.
- (2) **Polarization** of political debate.
- (3) Increase of (opportunistic) use of **plebescitarian instruments**.
- (4) **Weakening** of non-majoritarian institutions (e.g. courts & media).
- (5) Ultimately, a slow transformation into an **illiberal democracy**.



CONCLUSIONS

- (1) Although **populism** is broadly used as a *Kampfbegriff*, it can be clearly defined and used in political analysis.
- (2) Its main importance is in terms of its relationship with (liberal) **democracy**.
- (3) That relationship is complex: populism can be both a **corrective** *and* a **threat** for liberal democracy.
- (4) Populism is an **illiberal democratic response to undemocratic liberalism**.