

# Populism-- a Major Threat to International Security

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**ABSTRACT.** *Populism is a political approach that claims to represent the will of the majority. As populism belief revive in Europe and Middle East countries, more and more voices start to question its actual intention. Populism is now considered as the “opponent” of liberty which harms international peace. This article discusses three reasons why populism is becoming a major international security threat. It introduces how populism holds back the development of liberal democracy and internationalism, how its harm is magnified when combined with other modern threats.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Populism; International security; Democracy*

## 1. Introduction

Populism is a political approach that strives to appeal to ordinary people who feel that their concerns are disregarded by the established elite group. However, populism is gaining increasing opposite voices, questioning whether it truly represents the opinions of the majority, or simply manipulating the crowd. We believe its erosive effect on the domestic liberal democracy, blocking effect of the globalization and extending effect when it combines with other threats are three potential ways for populism to threaten the international security.

## 2. Populism Erode Liberal Democracy

Liberal democracy is famous for its resilience because of its solid principles like electoral democracy, separation of powers, freedom of speech, etc. While, populist movement has a strong erosive effect of these cornerstones of the democracy.

According to *Daniel Albertazzi and Sean Mueller* [1], “*the rule of majority is not the only thing we need to consider and respect. Instead, sometimes we need to constrain their power.*” This reveals the logical flaw of the populism that overstates of the will of the majority means simultaneously the ignorance or understate of that of the minority, such as some marginal groups like the LGBT and the ethnic and religious minority. Populists always use media as a weapon to demonize their ideological enemy, the liberalist, by forging some stories or exaggerating some figures related to the violence of immigrants. A clear example is the more bogus sex tapes of some liberal female politicians, reported by one article of the latest *<the Economist>*. Besides, populist parties in Poland and Italy tended to make some legislation changes to limit rights of the Muslim immigrants, which is another evidence to prove their damage on the principle of the separation of powers, since they seriously intervened the legislative right.

The intrinsic shortcoming of populist movement, like their non-compromising political position, penchant to an authoritarian power and obsequious attitudes towards nationalists, leave them with no choice but to be aggressive in order to satisfy their domestic voters. And these actions are usually contrary to the main principles of modern liberal democracy.

## 3. Populism Blocks Liberal Internationalism

According to *<populism and the economics of the globalization>* [2], the worldwide economy thrives upon globalization and international trade. However, it also evokes the worldwide populist movements because of the unfairness during the process and the inequity of the national position within the value chain. Some material-offering countries regard themselves as victims of the globalization and decide to apply protectionism instead of the liberalism in the field of the international commerce. To add insult to injury, some big powers, like

America, also show a sign to turn to the protectionism. For example, the US president, Donald Trump, just imposed unilaterally huge taxes on Chinese goods in order to build a “fair” Sino-American commercial relationship.

This kind of decay of liberal international commercial activities will accelerate the development of populist movement. Before, countries are bounded together by the interest of the commerce. However, when they decided to abandon the former cooperation and turn to competition, they build an imagined enemy. The Sino-American commercial war might be another good example. Once the US started to impose taxes on Chinese goods, the mainstream of Chinese media started to display films regarding to Korean War against American army and the official reporters used several times the word “American Imperialism” in the press conferences. Although we can somehow understand the anger of the Chinese government, this intentional direction of public opinion is a dangerous way.

#### **4. Populism and Other Modern Threats**

Populism further encroach democratic principles when being connected with other contemporary threats, like the religion extremism, the cyber-attack and the climate change.

Terrorism is an excellent example for terrorism itself is a production of extreme populism or religion extremism in the Middle East. Terrorists not only violate the universal human rights of people abroad by implementing attacks, they also doom their society by extreme means such as eliminating women from public life, destroying traditional Islamic art works. According to *<Major New Report: Rethinking the Threat of Islamic Extremism: the Changes Needed in U.S. Strategy>* [3], the author Cordesman connects Islamic Extremism with terrorism to prove the key of eliminating terrorism lies in consulting with the problems within Middle East countries. The problem of terrorism can be traced down to the deeply held Extremism and the conflicts between Islamic ideology and democracy.

Cyber development could be another fuse which might ignite the clashes of different native ideologies and prevent globalization. Internet connection can almost be found anywhere and can be accessed by millions of people from different social classes and cultural backgrounds. Inappropriate comments and works against certain cultures are hard to regulate within such a big pool of online information. In this case, misconception through the Internet may result in Populism parties’ formation in those cultures that are being attacked. The world thus becomes more sectionalized by the widespread of Internet, making peaceful international cooperation difficult to establish.

Climate change risk might also be a significant factor to extend the influence of the populism. Our human beings all know we should do something to avoid the world destruction by consuming too much fossil fuel or by cutting too many trees. While, when it comes to the action, perhaps all the countries try to pass the buck. Populism parties claim usually the domestic development first and blamed other countries for putting so much pressure on their shoulders that intervenes their sovereignty to make policies. The logic will lead to a dead-lock situation. For instance, the US just withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement, and China denied their huge responsibility of controlling the emission of CO<sub>2</sub>.

#### **5. Conclusion**

To sum up, as an antagonistic ideology against the liberalism, populism has a strong erosive effect upon several principles of the liberal democracy, like the separation of the powers, the speech freedom and the protection of the minority. Except the negative domestic effects, populism also influences the process of the globalization by exaggerating people’s fear of the invasion of other cultures and by overemphasizing the inequity of the global distribution chain. Another point is that populism can be more dangerous when it combines with other threats, like religion extremism, proliferation of cyber-attacks, indifference to the climate changes, etc. A huge question ceded to be solved is if it is possible for us to return back to the former liberal democracy and internationalism system or we have to face this new status quo and thus find a new way to avoid the potential severe truculence caused by the populism? It is not just a trade-off question; this answer might decide the new pattern of cooperation among our human beings, at least in the field of politic.

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