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The Appeal of Populism: Who are «the people»?

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Populism and Democracy

- Populist discourse/rhetoric challenges liberal democracy because it :
 - rejects the checks and balances systems between government and «the people»;
 - contests the validity of governments;
 - labels elected representatives are labelled as «elites»;
 - intermediary agencies are considered biased towards the elites;
 - «the people» denotes a homogeneous group (Pappas 2019, Rummens 2017, Mudde 2004).

Source: Der Spiegel, 2018.

Theory of Populism

IDEOLOGY

- “thin-centered ideology, that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde 2004: 543).

STRATEGY

- ‘populism is best defined as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers’ Weyland (2001: 14).

DISCOURSE

- “Populism in modern democratic societies is best seen as an appeal to ‘the people’ against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society” (Laclau 2005: 288).

Critical Heritages Project

CoHERE's objectives were:

- To take on an anthropological approach to understanding populism,
- To treat populism as a symptom of social-economic deprivation and/or nostalgic deprivation
- To investigate who are “the people” and why are the susceptible to populist rhetoric?



Relative deprivation

- Relative deprivation is the lack of resources to sustain a lifestyle, activities and amenities that an individual or group are accustomed to or that are widely encouraged or approved in the society to which they belong.
 - Feelings of economic, political, or social deprivation that are relative rather than absolute,
 - Discontent with politics and societal life,
 - Grievances of those who feel deprived are legitimised through collective actions.
 - Emerges as a new «community of sentiment» in which participants seek recognition as a collective unit.
 - Elites, minorities and immigrants (particularly Muslim-origin migrants) as the reference point for deprivation.

Nostalgic deprivation

- Nostalgic deprivation is the discrepancy between individuals' understandings of their current status and their perceptions about their past.
 - Immigration and demographic change threatens the established concepts of nation, identity, and their constitutive social hierarchies,
 - EUization and Europeanization are creates a sense of discontinuity in national identity,
 - It results in nostalgia/yearning for the past,
 - Populist parties pledge to restore the grandeur of the past,
 - Populist leaders address this deprivation by revitalizing the myths of the past and using a selective heritage discourse (ie. Jean D'arc, Roman history, Hellenic past).

Populist Leadership

- Leader often overshadows the party, creates a centralised authority that personafies the party's stance,
- They invest in societal and political polarization, and a Manichean World-view,
- They present themselves as one of the «people», sharing, and/or understanding the deprivations of the party's supporters,
- They invest in crisis, threats, and scandalization of social, economic, and cultural deprivations.

Deprivation and Extremism: Islamophobia

- Islamophobia is utilized by the media and populist political leaders to scapegoat Muslim-origin immigrants and Muslim societies by legitimising Islamophobia as a justified and innate fear,
 - Right-wing populist parties capitalize on the feeling of “being left behind” and not being able to compete with the «new immigrants»,
 - Lack of cultural integration (whether actual or perceived) among the Muslim-origin migrants challenges the cultural hierarchical structure and the lifestyles of Europeans,
 - Fear of «Eurabia»,
 - Populist parties’ civilisationist rhetoric appeals to the relatively deprived,
 - It creates a legitimises the local perceived/actual deprivation on a global scale.

Yellow Vests and Populism

- Yellow vests express their resentment towards their individualized life, fragmented families,
- They have feelings of deprivation and feeling left behind,
- They lack emphasis on leadership, which departs from the conventional populism theories,
- They don't seek political representation but they demand political change.

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