Introduction: Analyzing the Nexus Between Populism and International Relations

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A populist wave is sweeping across many countries around the world, becoming one of the most important topics in current political and social science debates. Many on the right herald populism as an improved and more direct form of democracy, which seeks to upend decades of social disintegration, promising action against political and economic elites in favor of a long-suffering "silent majority". Those on the left (though not exclusively) often present populism as a threat to democracy and civil society, and the harbinger of authoritarian rule, threatening to overturn the modern human rights movement.[1] One side denounces identity politics, political correctness, and the expansion of the welfare state, while the other side fears a return to European-style fascism of the 1930s.[2]

The proliferation of articles and books on the topic has grown exponentially in the wake of the UK's Brexit vote in 2015 and a string of electoral victories for populist parties across Europe. On both sides of the Atlantic, populist leaders from what we might see as the left and right of the traditional political spectrum have either become the government (through promising major change) or have entered legislatures as a vocal opposition to politics as usual. This includes the administration of Donald Trump, whose populist style and policies may radically alter American politics and International Relations (IR) as it has been studied since the end of the Cold War, but also numerous governments in Europe, Latin America, and Asia.[3]

Populism Research and IR: The Missing Link

Despite significant attention paid to the phenomenon, populism's inter- and transnational aspects remain underexplored, much to the detriment of both IR and populism research. Populism researchers have mainly focused on theoretical issues, or have examined individual

national cases (in isolation or in a comparative fashion), while IR scholars have largely elided the phenomenon. Only recently has IR as a discipline turned to populism, mainly as a result of Trump's rise to the U.S. presidency. This emerging literature on the populism-world-politics nexus suffers from two shortcomings. First, aside from a few exceptions, studies have been primarily concerned with individual leaders' effect on world politics. Thus, a large proportion of the literature is, for instance, concerned with the potential negative effects of a Trump presidency on "the West" and liberal world order more generally.[4] Systematic and more general (beyond individual leaders) reflections on how populism and different aspects of world politics (e.g., foreign policy, international conflict, and cooperation or world order) hang together are still rare.[5] This concerns both the effects of populism on world politics and vice versa. This aspect is linked to the second problem, namely that many IR studies draw on an underspecified concept of populism that does not differentiate between left and right or moderate and extremist groups[6]— let alone other dimensions used to distinguish between different forms populism, such as inclusionary/exclusionary forms of populism.[7] As a consequence, a vastly heterogeneous group of parties, movements and individuals is listed as examples of populism, ranging from the right-wing extremist French Front National to the radical leftist Syriza in Greece, from moderate social democrat Bernie Sanders to illiberal but democratically elected leaders like Viktor Orbán and Jaroslaw Kaczy.ski to authoritarian rulers like Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdo.an and Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte. This becomes even more problematic once we turn to an analysis of the potential consequences of populism for established social institutions. Most notably, the question to what extent populism is a danger to democracy, European integration, the transatlantic alliance or the liberal world order has been the subject of significant debate both in the media and increasingly academic scholarship as well.[8] Unfortunately, most contributions do not sufficiently differentiate here between different types of populism but, quite to the contrary, lump vastly heterogeneous actors and ideologies together and make a sweeping statement labeling all of them a danger to democracy, Europe, the West or liberal world order. For instance, Fareed Zakaria lists Trump, Bernie Sanders, Syriza, and the Front National as examples of populism just to proclaim that "the West is in trouble".[9] Similarly, Jeff Colgan and Robert O. Keohane seem to equate right-wing populism with populism as such when they claim that the latter is marked by the "belief that each country has an authentic 'people' who are held back by the collusion of foreign forces and self-serving elites at home".[10] Suggesting

that populism as such is a danger, they continue that a populist leader "seeks to weaken or destroy institutions such as legislatures, judiciaries, and the press and to cast off external restraints in defense of national sovereignty".[11] Again, here, right and left, moderate and extreme versions of populism are carelessly lumped together. As opposed to such sweeping generalizations, even a cursory disaggregation of the category "populism" quickly reveals that there is not much the so-called "populists" agree upon, certainly not that democracy and the liberal world order are to be abolished. While Bernie Sanders's campaign called for increased U.S. commitment to international agreements, Trump's declared aim was to re-evaluate all international obligations with respect to whether they actually benefit the United States, leading some observers to warn of an impending "Amerexit".[12]

From the perspective of populism research, this is not at all surprising. For while populism researchers do stress common elements of the phenomenon—most notably a strong criticism of an allegedly unresponsive elite and a corresponding demand for the restoration of sovereignty of the people[13]—they also agree that different populist movements and their demands can vastly differ from context to context. Whether one conceives of populism as a "thin-centered" ideological skeleton,[14] a political style,[15] a style of communication[16] or a specific form of discourse, [17] what populism researchers agree on is that populism as such is rather anemic in terms of actual content and in practice always has to be combined with other concepts, ideas or discourses. Seen from this perspective, then, it is not populism as such that makes the difference in terms of a particular movement's hostility to, for instance, democracy or the liberal world order but the context-specific ideological flesh that is put on the populist skeleton. In fact, anti-elitism and the demand for a restoration of the people's influence on politics can be an expression of both, justified criticism of an insufficiently democratic system and (illegitimate) anti-democratic demagoguery.[18] Contra those who claim that populism as such is a danger to democracy or the liberal world order, populism research seems to suggest that it depends on the specific ideological makeup of a given populist movement or party.[19] Authoritarian populism certainly is a danger to pluralist democracy, but other forms might not be.[20] Equally, it makes sense to assume that not all populisms are a danger to the liberal world order or European integration, but primarily those that combine populist demands with, say, hyper-nationalism or protectionism.[21] Nevertheless, in contrast to the bulk of populism research, many IR studies continue to treat populism as a monolith, and this has significant consequences, both analytical and practical. First, the way populism is often

understood in the IR literature makes it virtually useless for any differentiated analysis. Treating populism as a catch-all term for any party or movement that criticizes political elites makes it impossible to separate populism from other phenomena, and as a result any analysis unavoidably suffers.[22] It is thus no surprise that systematic studies of the populism- world-politics nexus are largely lacking. For if populism cannot be meaningfully distinguished from non-populism, any attempt to theorize its relationship to international phenomena such as foreign policy or world order is futile. Second, presuming that some of the movements currently labeled "populist" are in fact opposed to liberal democracy, the European Union, the transatlantic alliance or the liberal world order (and there is a good reason to do so),[23] Western democracies do face the challenge of having to deal with them. Here, insufficient concept specification can stand in the way of effective political action, for any political action requires the ability to distinguish dangerous from harmless phenomena. The ways populism is used in much of the literature, in particular in IR, any analysis of the potential danger of "populism" for democracy, the European Union, the West or world order will unavoidably end up either exaggerating or playing down the dangers posed by them individually. As a consequence, the current discussion of populism is more misleading than helpful. Populism research, on the other hand, has largely neglected the phenomenon's inter- and transnational aspects. Here, the bulk of research falls within three broad categories: First, a body of work has endeavored to clarify the concept of populism, and to discuss methodological aspects,[24] while exploring populism's relationship to related phenomena, such as liberal democracy,[25] European integration[26] or leadership.[27] Second, other researchers have engaged in unit-level examinations of individual (mostly national) parties or movements,[28] specific (regional) types of populism,[29] and potential reasons for their appeal.[30] Third, comparative approaches draw out similarities and differences between a range of movements or parties according to selected variables.[31] In sum, in the populism literature, a gap exists in the systematized examination of populism's inter- and transnational aspects. The neglect of populism's global dimension by both IR and populism research is quite problematic. For if populism manifests itself as a particular style of politics or discourse, it seems only reasonable to assume that this extends to international politics. In addition, the borders between foreign and domestic politics are becoming increasing blurred. Populism is likely to have an impact on both foreign policy—"the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually but not

exclusively a state) in international relations"[32]—and world politics, the larger totality of different actors' interactions that takes place across national boundaries.[33]

The Case for Increased Dialogue

For most foreign policy and IR theorists, aside from offensive realists[34] or neoclassical realists who stress the importance of systemic pressures,[35] it matters who is in power. A significant body of research highlights the importance of individual leaders and advisors for the making of foreign policy.[36] Whether driven by their core beliefs,[37] leadership styles,[38] personality traits[39] or their advisors, leadership over military and foreign policymaking does matter a great deal. This is especially so if someone with views radically different from his or her predecessor enters office. In addition, constructivists and "critical" scholars have long promoted ideational factors in foreign policy formulation. In their analyses, they include, for instance, ideologies[40] and gender constructions.[41] Certainly, not all of these perspectives necessarily come into play in the analysis of populism. For instance, personality should be seen as a factor independent of populism (whether understood as an ideology, discourse, or worldview).[42] If we take research on populism (whether understood as an ideology, discourse or worldview) as a starting point, there are good reasons to assume that once in power, populists may differ from more conventional leaders. However, in contradistinction to the rather simplistic and often alarmist views, widespread in the media, that populism as such is a danger to international cooperation and/or world order,[43] populism research actually suggests that differences between various forms of populism[44] will likely also manifest themselves in different foreign policy positions. Thus, IR scholars can benefit from making this body of research their starting point in any analysis, and any useful assessment and explanation of foreign policy change depends on a thorough analysis of which kind of populists are making policies in a given country. Despite obvious differences of opinion, many—but, importantly, not all—populists converge on the need to undermine international cooperation and integration, regional and world orders. Donald Trump's "America First" strategy is a good example, according to which the United States has to stop supporting other governments "free of charge".[45] This indicates a critical change in the traditional American view that international cooperation was an end in itself, as was the provision of global public goods to ensure U.S. prestige and hegemony.[46] If Trump indeed signals the advent of fascism in the United States, as some observers fear,[47]

this would erode the joint normative basis of "the West" and of liberal world order.[48] Even if one understands populism as a superficial style, analogized as a loud and uninhibited drunken guest at a dinner party,[49] this style may nevertheless have an effect on the tenor and outcome of international negotiations like the 2018 G7 summit meeting in Canada. Earlier, Trump's harsh economic critique of NATO allies, his denigration of long-standing trading arrangements like the North American Free Trade Agreement has led to significant regional and transatlantic discord.[50]

The degree to which many populists question core foreign-policy commitments of mainstream parties justifies a more systematic analysis. In principle, populists in government could influence a plethora of international phenomena, including but not limited to international order and change,[51] international rule (Herrschaft), resistance, authority (Autorität), and its politicization[52] as well as associated questions like the legitimacy of international organizations, regimes, leadership,[53] and regional and world order(s).[54] Constructivist research suggests that many of these phenomena, including legitimacy,[55] and security communities,[56] are (re-) produced and contested in processes of social construction (or discursive struggles). If so, populist political interventions could have an important impact on these matters. IR scholars can benefit significantly from the work of populism researchers, who have spent substantial time and effort theorizing the phenomenon, distinguishing it from related issues, and systematizing different forms. In this context, studies on left- and right-wing[57] and inclusive and exclusive58 populism literature can help counter simplistic assumptions of populism being either universally positive or negative for alliance building, trade, globalization, security communities, or world order. Populism researchers have long ago understood that thick ideologies matter a great deal to the "thin-centered" ideological skeleton that is populism.[59] Criticizing elites and calling for the general will to be realized in and of itself does not tell us anything about a party's position on the United Nations or NATO. Similarly, populism researchers can profit from increased engagement with IR research, which can contribute to a better understanding of populist successes and failures. As Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser observe, "surprisingly few established theories about the success (and failure) of populist forces exist".[60] IR can contribute to theory-building in that field, as there is a good reason to assume that international developments might contribute to populist successes and failures.[61] Two aspects in particular are relevant here: the denationalization of

political rule, combined with the politicization of international authority, and cross-border interaction between populists.

First, researchers point to globalization and global governance, and a perceived decline in domestic political control over these processes, as factors contributing to the rising appeal of populism. Recent studies on the legitimacy of international organizations and other global governance arrangements point to increased politicization of international authority.[62] The argument goes as follows: the growing involvement of international institutions in virtually all areas of domestic policymaking, in combination with the declining legitimacy of domestic political institutions leads to increased politicization of the electorate. Debates between proponents and opponents of regional and/or international integration have become a central focus of political attention in many Western countries. Read in this context, populism primarily emerges as a reaction to the simultaneous increase in authority and depoliticization of global governance.[63] That is, international developments play an important role in explaining populist parties' current election successes. Second, the success of populist parties and movements depends on transnational interaction, that is, how various national parties and movements are connected to each other through information sharing, repertoires of contention, discourse, ideology, learning, and norm diffusion. Different parties often draw on similar intellectual resources or adopt ideas introduced in other countries. For example, Greece's Syriza and Spain's Podemos are linked through common intellectual roots, both drawing on the work of the late Argentinian political theorist Ernesto Laclau.[64] Similarly, recent research on party politics has provided evidence that parties learn from their successful counterparts in other countries.[65] Moreover, populist parties are often embedded in transnational networks. For instance, a number of European right-wing parties are supported by the Kremlin,[66] and ongoing debates about Russian interference in the U.S. presidential elections may demonstrate how different populist actors support each other. Finally, of importance are the ways traditional mainstream parties have been obliged to play within a new populist framework. Centre-left parties in Europe have seen their electoral support greatly reduced, while centre-right parties have promoted populist anti-immigrant discourses to regain lost voters. In order to understand the success of populist movements and parties, we need to pay attention to its international aspects. Here, research in IR and related fields on globalization, global governance and state transformation,[67] norm dynamics,[68] diffusion,[69] learning,[70] transnational advocacy coalitions,[71] and transnational networks more generally,[72]

the differential production of identities[73] and the emergence of discursive orders[74] can provide a helpful starting point. However, these aspects require more systematic, theoretically oriented and comparative research to be assessed reliably.

Plan of the Book

The chapters of the volume are situated within the larger framework of the populism-world politics nexus. We have divided this into three parts: Part I introduces theoretical approaches to the study of populism and global politics. In his opening chapter, Jan Zeemann explores the potential of a global populist project. While populism is commonly seen to be intertwined with nationalism, he asks whether the concept of the nation is a mandatory part of populist articulations. He posits that a focus on form over content enables us to imagine populism beyond the confines of the nation-state. A global populist movement, he concludes, might be part of the solution to contemporary challenges like climate change or economic crises. From a different theoretical perspective, María Esperanza Casullo analyzes the role of populist leadership, and argues that various socially available discursive scripts exist that can mediate between the social and the individual levels. Populist leaders present themselves as patriotic military men, social movement leaders, or selfless businessmen. Her chapter concludes that the global diffusion of these scripts generates different possibilities for popular projects. Finally, Precious Chatterje-Doody and Rhys Crilley analyze the nexus between populism and the global media, devising an alternative model for looking at populism as a "transnational communication logic". After developing their model, they apply it to three empirical cases: legacy media, opposition political movements, and international broadcasting.

Part II shifts the focus to populist foreign policies with a range of comparative case studies and theoretical reflections. First, Dirk Nabers and Frank Stengel begin with an overview of Donald Trump's foreign policy. The chapter advances the discourse theoretical notion of sedimented practices, using campaign speeches as well as statements related to the foreign policy of America's 45th president as an illustration. They conduct a discourse analysis inspired by poststructuralist discourse theory and theories of populism. In contrast, Brian Budd sheds light on how contemporary manifestations of populism in Canada are co-constructed though normative performances of gender. He focuses specifically on the failed leadership campaign of Conservative MP Kellie Leitch, who attempted to deploy anti-immigrant nativist forms of

populism to court her party's voters. Theoretically, Budd notes that this form of discourse failed in Canada even though it had considerable success in the United States, suggesting that the diffusion of populism from one country to the next is contingent on distinct political cultures. In his chapter, Grant Burrier offers a systematized study of populism and Latin-American foreign policies. He focuses on defense and trade policy to ascertain whether there are substantive consequences to populist presidencies, using an innovative longitudinal cohort comparison from contemporary Latin America. Also focusing on Latin-American cases, Daniel Wajner investigates possible patterns in the formulation and implementation of foreign policies among populist regimes during the periods known as "classic populism" (1930s–1950s), "neoliberal neopopulism" (1980s–1990s), and "progressive neopopulism" (2000s onwards). Analyzing variance in time and space, Wajner distinguishes a tendency among Latin-American populist regimes to support regionalist and globalist policies by empowering identity-based solidarities. David MacDonald's chapter offers a critique of the misleading either/or comparisons often made between populism and pluralism. He uses the case of the New Zealand First political party and its leader Winston Peters to demonstrate that electorally successful and relevant parties often approach populism as a style which can be either deployed or downplayed as the situation requires. This chapter focuses on a unique case of populism, promoted by an Indigenous Maori leader and an Indigenous-led caucus. Finally, Thorsten Wojczewski draws on a poststructuralist, discourse theoretical framework to analyze how the Indian Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its leader Narendra Modi used foreign policy as a site for the construction and maintenance of a populist electoral coalition. In contrast to common understandings of ideology as a "distortion of reality", Wojczewski argues that the ideological dimension of populism lies in masking the discursive character of what we view as social reality, and the resulting impossibility of a fully constituted subject such as "the people". Part III of the volume focuses on the global and international dimensions of the rise of populism. Robert Patman's contribution assesses how the liberal order has proven to be more resilient to the pressures of nationalist, populist forces than many observers imagined. Far from ending globalization, Patman maintains, the major impact of post-truth populism may be to intensify liberal efforts to address its downsides, including spiraling civil conflicts, environmental decline, and growing inequality. In a somewhat different approach, Shane Markowitz examines the rise of populism as a socio-material phenomenon. He employs insights from the discourse around genetically modified organisms

in the European Union. The chapter explores the ways in which the emergence of populist discourses on the issue has not only been constituted by rhetoric in the context of regional and national elections, but also importantly by an array of material, natural, and technological entities and forces.

Finally, Amy Skonieczny looks at the nexus between populism and global trade by scrutinizing the debates on the TransPacific Partnership (TPP) and U.S. trade with China and Mexico. The chapter examines the role of emotions in populist, anti-trade narratives to develop an understanding of how and why populism is emotionally powerful and what drives this particular narrative to combine with anti-trade protectionism. The conclusion by Stengel, MacDonald, and Nabers draws together the different arguments found throughout this edited collection, and provides a preliminary agenda for further research on populism and world politics.

Notes

1. Roth (2017), Kagan (2016).

2. Faulkner (2017).

3. Lapham (2016).

4. Stokes (2018), Norrlof (2018), Chacko and Jayasuriya (2017), Patrick

(2017), Colgan and Keohane (2017), Boyle (2016), Zakaria (2016).

5. But see Chryssogelos (2017), Verbeek and Zaslove (2017) as exceptions.

6. Hawkins (2009).

7. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013).

8. Owen (2017), Müller (2016a), Roth (2017), Zakaria (2016).

9. Zakaria (2016).

10. Colgan and Keohane (2017, 36).

11. Ibid.

12. Kornblum (2016).

13. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017, 6).

14. Mudde (2007, 23).

15. Moffitt and Tormey (2014).

16. Block and Negrine (2017).

17. Laclau (2005).

18. Indeed, there is a lively debate in political theory about whether Western democracies are still democratic or at least whether democracy is under threat, so any public critique of the current system does not necessarily have to be without basis (Crouch 2004; Brown 2015).

19. Taggart and Kaltwasser (2016).

20. Brewer (2016), Huber and Schimpf (2017), Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014).

21. Stavrakakis (2015), Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014).

22. Wonka (2007).

23. Boyle (2016), Buzogány (2017).

24. Stavrakakis (2017).

25. Canovan (2002), Grattan (2016), Müller (2016b).

26. Mudde (2016).

27. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2014).

28. Ahluwalia and Miller (2016), Batory (2016), Decker (2016), Fallend and Heinisch (2016), Gifford (2006), Grimm (2015), Kenneth White (2016), Oliver and Rahn (2016), Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014).

29. Kaltwasser (2014), Stavrakakis et al. (2017).

30. Inglehart and Norris (2016).

31. Kaltwasser (2011), Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013).

32. Hill (2016, 4).

33. Waltz (1996).

34. Mearsheimer (2001).

35. See, e.g., Wivel (2017), Rathbun (2008), Schweller (2004), Rose (1998).

36. Inter alia, Byman and Pollack (2001), Hermann et al. (2001).

37. George (1969), Schafer and Walker (2006), Walker and Schafer (2010).

38. Greenstein (2005), Kaarbo and Hermann (1998).

39. Coolidge and Segal (2007), Görener and Ucal (2011).

40. Bell (2002), Goldstein and Keohane (1993), Maull (2000), as well as discourse Hansen (2006), Larsen (1997), Nabers (2015).

41. Athanassiou (2012), Managhan (2012), Poloni-Staudinger and Ortbals (2014), Sjoberg and Tickner (2013).

42. However, some studies also highlight that psychological factors have an impact on populist voting (Bakker et al. 2016). Similarly, one could expect also populist leaders to share certain personality traits.

43. Applebaum (2016), Wesslau (2016), Zakaria (2016).

44. March (2017), Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013, 2017), Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014).

45. Trump, quoted in The New York Times (2016).

46. Brooks et al. (2012), Legro (2000).

47. Augstein (2016), Kagan (2016), Gökarıksel and Smith (2016).

48. Boyle (2016), Nabers and Stengel (2017).

49. Arditi (2007, 78).

50. Although the burden-sharing debate is a constant theme within NATO (Yost 2000) and also played a role in Barack Obama's two terms in office, who also complained about free-riding (Mattelaer 2016), Trump has been much more vocal and blunt about these matters, complaining about others' expectations for the U.S. to protect them. Thus, Trump made clear that if allies were not willing to pay for U.S. assistance, he would drop them: "Then, yes, I would be absolutely prepared to tell those countries, 'Congratulations, you will be defending yourself'" quoted in De Luce and McLeary (2016).

51. Stetter (2013).

52. Bonacker and Ecker-Ehrhardt (2013), Bonacker et al. (2014), Daase and Deitelhoff (2015), Deitelhoff and Daase (2015), Nonhoff et al. (2009), Seibel (2015), Zürn (2014), Zürn et al.(2012).

53. Geis et al. (2012), Gronau et al. (2009), Nabers (2010), Nullmeier and Nonhoff (2010).

54. Kissinger (2014), Ikenberry et al. (2015).

55. Nullmeier and Nonhoff (2010), order Bially Mattern (2005).

56. Adler and Barnett (1998).

57. Priester (2012), March (2017).

58. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013).

59. Mudde (2007, 2016).

60. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017, 97).

61. Also Verbeek and Zaslove (2017).

62. Seibel (2015), Zürn (2004, 2014, 2016), Zürn et al. (2012), with respect to populism specifically Chryssogelos (2017).

63. Zürn (2004), Zürn et al. (2012).

64. McKean (2016), see Laclau (2005).

65. Böhmelt et al. (2016).

66. Mudde (2016, 24).

67. Held and McGrew (2007), Leibfried et al. (2015), Rhodes (2007), Rosenau and Czempiel (1992), Sørensen (2004), Zürn (2013).

68. Engelkamp and Glaab (2015), Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), March and Olsen (1998), Panke and Petersohn (2011), Rosert (2012).

69. Gilardi (2013).

70. Levy (1994).

71. Bloodgood (2011), Keck and Sikkink (1998), Pierce and Hicks (2017).

72. Madsen and Christensen (2016), Slaughter (2004).

73. Campbell (1998), Diez (2004), Hansen (2006), Neumann (1999).

74. Diez (2013), Herschinger (2011), Nabers (2015).

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