

Chapter 3

The Rising Tide of Populism and Its Implications to Global Governance in the 21st Century: A Modern Discourse on an Age-Old Issue in Politics

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ABSTRACT

The rising tide of populism in the 21st century brings about new challenges to an age-old problem in politics. Among them is to identify and understand the symptoms and causes of populism in the modern era. As a political approach which holds "the forgotten man and women" as a morally good force against the perceived corrupt and self-serving "establishment," this chapter analyzes the populist phenomenon and how it can bring about dividends, not just constraints. This chapter ends by recommending policy-makers to re-think and re-adjust global institutions to be more inclusive, to enhance their nations' cybersecurity measures, and to promote free speech. Overall, populism is a signal that something is inherently wrong in today's global society. Rather than turning a blind eye to the issue, leaders should take a hard look at the facts and understand that there are genuine grievances that have to be identified and solved in building a just and equitable new world order. We can only ignore populism at our peril.

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INTRODUCTION

Populism is rising in an age where democratic states are more vulnerable more than ever to pursue actions that could lead to tremendous and unnecessary uncertainties as a response to whims and madness of the populist crowds (James, 2008). Although there is no set definition to the term populism, it can nevertheless be interpreted as an ideational approach which holds “the forgotten man and women” as a morally good force against the perceived corrupt and self-serving “establishment” (Bonikowski, 2016). This chapter contributes to the significant societal and political question of our time in helping to add to the increasing discourse on populism and its effects on global governance in the 21st century.

As an ever-present primordial element in a society’s development, populism has the effect of increasing political participation in society. It can also test the limits of free speech while challenging existing institutions to be more accountable to the people. Additionally, ignoring populism can only bring peril to politicians and leaders, as was the case of how President Trump shocking rise to power in light of the disappointing failures of President Obama to deal with the inemurable socio-economic issues of his presidency. While some people find Trump’s language, persona, and policy ideas disturbing, it is hard to say that he is not doing it on behalf of the people. He, much like any elected leader, is the personification of the will of the governed, after all. If the institutions are strong, however, then there is little chance these democratic nations could fall into tyranny. The silent majority knows this in the US, and this is what makes democratic societies unique and robust. As such, they can very much afford to experiment with populism. Indeed, Churchill was correct when he said: “that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time” (Churchill.org). The same cannot be said the same for countries with weak democratic institutions, however. Then again, populism helps put the brakes on unbridled globalization, demanding the forces of globalization to serve the people instead of those already in the positions of power and wealth (Arditi and Barros, 2005)

Understandably, populism has its share of constraints. Among them is how it can leave nations caught in a populist vortex making it vulnerable to foreign interference or “active measures” (Watanabe, 2018). There may be chances that a nation may undermine its long-term geostrategic interests by opting for policies that are popular at the moment, but inherently disastrous to the long-term polity. An example of this issue is Brexit in the U.K. Brexit was popular in 2016 but is it all that good in the long-run? Implications remain debatable, but by the end of January 2019, over three-quarters of the public (78%) felt that the Government was doing badly at negotiating Britain’s exit from the EU and with the half of Britons having a bad opinion of Theresa May’s leadership (YouGov.com, 2019). severalThe increased

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