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Understanding and Tracing Causes of Populism in Western Europe

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Abstract:

This study explores that Populism is most rudimentary aspect that has got the appreciable attention of whole world. Today, populism can be represented with the apparition that is engulfing the whole world more specifically Europe as well as other Western countries. In the current era, the proceedings of populism can be observed into the vote of UK for its departure from EU as well as victory of Donald Trump in US and Marine Le Pen in addition to Alternative in Germany. According to a detailed survey report, it has been observed that foundation of populism in Europe is as ancient as compared to the populist parties creation in various other countries such as Independence Party prevailing in UK, AfD in Germany, movement of Five Star in Italy, foundation of Golden Dawn in Greece, democratic party prevailing in Sweden, existence of Freedom Movement in Austria, creation of Law and Justice movement in the various parts of Poland, Jobbik party in Hungary and all these movements or parties that fall under the category of populism came into being since 2012.

Keywords: *Populism, Identity, Nationalism, Globalization, Homogenous entity.*

Introduction:

Populism prevailed well in France during the year of 2014 when the party of Le Pen occupied the well-known positions in the election of EU as well as regional election that occurred exactly one year after the European elections. Therefore, it is well documented that rise of populism in EU is the marvelous step in the history of research and study. The major reason behind this phenomenon is the extraordinary significance for the amalgamation of various countries under the rudimentary project of European Union. In a detailed study, it is explained that the basic purpose of EU was the sustainability and preservation of tranquility, peace, harmony and assimilation of various countries of Southern as well as Eastern Europe. Contrary to this, after the establishment of EU venture, unavailability of proper budgeting contributed towards

economic catastrophe in recent years and have brought the sustainability of EU into alarming situation.

Therefore, the residents of various countries that fall under EU started distrust the economic as well as political set up of the EU scheme. Under such despondent conditions, the rise of populism in EU is most devastating phenomenon. Ultimately, it can be stated that during that era, the existence of populism in EU started that remained on rising track after that in the following years till today. Furthermore, it can be observed that rise of populism has two most rudimentary reasons in the various parts of EU including the foundation of assorted list of parties having the establishment of populism movement. The major reason behind this phenomenon is the alarming risk towards the cultural sustainability of various nations due to the prevailing strict and un-stretchable policies of EU venture and ultimately initiation of criticism by public sector. The other rudimentary attribute for the rising tendency of populism in EU is the shaking economic condition of various countries more specifically the nations that were having the low economic graph as compared to others and it became the difficult for them to cope the well-developed and established countries. This factor started the insecurity for the national identity as well as alarming risk towards the national economic graph.

Due to rise in populism there can be observed despondent socio-economic impact on the various nations including European Union. According to a report, the researchers explained that they have compared the regions that suffer foremost from this problem. To save the prosperity of EU, it is necessary to manage the national economies in EU and focus national businesses. The change in unemployment and not in its place is amid balloting by means of the powerless parties; this EU project due to the rise of populism and to the sole of our knowledge will end within the invention of books on the function of monetary loss in livelihoods and happiness. The researcher is therefore interested in exploring a two-dimensional (2SLS) output approach the unemployment element by means of rise in populism, specialization of local economic system and the proportion of production.

Nationalism is the basis of populism. It also needs hatred when combined with a messianic ideology. It uses identity as a tool to understand 'Us' vs 'Them' dichotomy. Nationalism was defined by Gellner as "primarily a political principle which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent". Nationalism was analyzed by Gellner from a historical perspective.

Additionally, the theoretical mapping of identity/alterity nexus in International Relations Theory as presented by Xavier Guillaume in his book "International Relations and Identity: A Dialogical Approach" has been employed in this thesis by the researchers.

Identity are generally of two types – corporate identity and social identity. In IR, identity is simply defined as a homology. Corporate identities are defined as "self-organizing, homeostatic structures that make actors distinct entities". They are unitary are not compound and not complex social entities. Therefore, corporate identities are generally seen as interacting between them or from a systematic point of view as being positioned in the international system actually defined by this objectification. Throughout the time, these units remain constant and might only differ among themselves by their exogenously given properties and preferences. Meanwhile, social identities can be defined as "sets of meanings that an actor attributes to itself while taking the perspective of others, that is, as a social object."

Many IR scholars do not consider identity as an explanatory factor or as an analytical category unless material-based interest explanations have been exhausted. These scholars view identity as an adjunct or secondary factor. Moreover, traditional conceptualizations of identity tend to follow a "modern orthodoxy".

From realist tradition, identity is therefore pre-given and identified as the state identity, thus akin to a corporate identity, or, for the liberal tradition, it is dissolved into a myriad of individual or group interests that are then reflected by it. Therefore, it won't be wrong to say that there exist no theoretical assessment of how IR theories treat identity/alterity nexus per se.

Guillaume locates himself in the identity debate in IR theorizing. He partakes in the discussion whether international actors are to be treated as entities with clear ideas of their own, solidified, identities or not. Similarly, he discusses the notion that whether the idea of self-need to be constructed as a metaphor or rather as a product of a dialogical process which involves focusing on "the characterization of the processes, the transformation, whatever the normative characters these forms [of identity construction] take".

He conceptualizes identity as an event. Identity or the process of identity construction, as conceived by him, remained an 'on-going struggle for meaning'. Guillaume argues that even if an identity seems continuous, such identity is about to collapse. Alterity remains central to the conceptualization of identity.

Characteristics of Populism:

Generally, there are four common characteristics of populists throughout the history which are as follows:

- **Centrality of the citizens** – They always emphasize upon the centrality of the people in the political structure. However, it remains unclear as to what 'the people' actually refer to.

- **Criticize the elite** – The populists always propagate the notion that the people are exploited by a corrupt and selfish elite.
- **People a homogeneous entity** – The populists believe that the people with whom they usually identify is a homogenous entity.
- **Proclaiming a serious crisis** – The populists always imply that the exploitation of the people by the elite contribute towards a serious political, economic or cultural crisis.

An analysis of the selected populist actors - Watson's People's Party and Perot's Reform Party (United States), Perón's Justicialist Party (Argentina), Chávez's MVR/PSUV (Venezuela), FN (France) and Forza Italia (Italy) reveals the commonality of the all above four general characteristics attributed to the populists. In brief, political actors who are labelled as populists have several commonalities between them. This can help scholars / analysts to compare 19th century American populists with 20th century Latin American populists and 21st century populist leaders in Western Europe.

In addition to the general characteristics, populists do exhibit organizational characteristics. These characteristics concern the way in which populist organizations are constituted. In this regard, centralization of the leader play a pivotal role. Moreover, populists always want to maintain a loosely held relationship between leader and followers. In other words, intermediate institutions / organizations should not act as the middle man.

Causes of Populism:

Eversince the emergence of radical right wing parties in Western Europe, international newspapers are flooded with various explanations as to what causes the rise of populism. A review of these explanations suggest that there are two main reasons for rise of populism. First is the occurrence of a historical event which has contributed towards the rise of populism in a specific country.

On the other hand, 2008 global financial crisis is viewed as the other factor contributing towards the emergence of populist parties. Academics have reject both these assertions as fundamentally wrong. Populist parties have been able to secure votes in nearly every European country with different historical trajectories. Therefore, the historical factor stands null and void. Moreover, populist parties have been able to gain greater voter share in richer northern European countries whereas they have not been able to gain significant representation in southern European countries. Therefore, the economic factor also does not hold any weightage in explaining rise of populism.

The macro-level developments can be categorized into two major parts – demand side developments and supply side developments. Demand side developments refer to those developments that give rise to the deep political discontent that clearly underpins rising support

for populism. On the other hand, supply side developments refer to the ways in which public policies and party strategies impinge on this support.

An analysis of the causes of populism helps in understanding that the causes can be divided into two broad categories – cultural factors and economic factors. In this chapter, the researcher studies perhaps four cultural factors – opposition to changes in values since the 1960s, anti-immigration hatred, racism and Islamophobia. The four economic factors which are perhaps studied in this chapter are wage stagnation, loss of manufacturing jobs, growing inequality and economic insecurity or precariousness. However, it is pertinent to mention that no specific set of factors can be out rightly pointed out for rise of populism in Western Europe. The rising tendency of populism in the region is the amalgamation of a number of cultural and economic factors and those that still are in the process of making huge difference of outputs i.e. AI revolution and resultant digital technology.

Cultural Factors:

Cultural factors are the driving force behind the rise of populism. Voters who have voted for populist parties are more concerned about changing cultural implications on society than economic issues. Using 2002 European Social Survey, Oesch's comparative analysis also concluded that cultural protectionism was the main motivating factor for right wing supporters than economic protectionism.

1. Rise of Postmodern values

The first prominent cultural factor which has been identified as contributing towards rise of populism is the rise of postmodern values. These values include cultural diversity and secularism. The rise of these values has serious impact on how traditional middle class was arranged and how they lived their lives. Consequently, economic losers – those who previously hailed from hitherto well-off social sectors are attracted towards appeals of radical right-wing populist parties (which strongly emphasize on immigration and family values) or radical left-wing parties (which strongly emphasize on inequality and the need of economic redistribution).

2. Anti-immigration hatred

Taking advantage of the disparity within the society, populists champion the cause of ordinary citizens who are not able to harness benefits associated with globalization. In recent years, anti-immigration hatred has emerged as the one of the main factors contributing towards rising tendency of populism. Consequently, the message of inequality resonate well. The proliferation of technological developments due to globalization has laid groundwork for the emergence and spread of populism. It is important that rising anti-immigration hatred need to be factored in because populists mostly speak occasional truth. Additionally, they aim to represent those who

are considered losers of globalization-induced economic changes of this century and claim to be in direct contact with sovereign people and thus claiming public mandate and legitimacy.

3. Globalization

Globalization greatly expanded opportunities for all stakeholders in production supply chain. It also helped poor countries like China to rapidly transform farmers into manufacturing workers which contributed towards enhancing growth and reducing poverty. On the other hand, globalisation process also led many countries towards financial crisis and later forced them to adopt austerity measures. The primary reason how globalisation contributed to the rise of populism was due to the distributional and similar economic fault lines created by it which resulted in generation of public support for anti-establishment movements which are generally positioned outside the political mainstream. Additionally, the problems of economic anxiety, discontent, loss of legitimacy, fairness mostly do not come up with obvious solutions or policy perspectives.

4. Racism

Racism helps define populism. The populist ideology creates a distinction between pure people and corrupt political elite. Consequently, populist electoral strategy is therefore based on the power of reigning the power of the elite, ridding the country of corruption and improving living standards of the people.

5. Islamophobia

There are structural causes which has led towards Islamophobia. The visibility of Islam have instigated anti-religious hatred in Europe. Additionally, 9/11 and 7/7 attacks and 'Islam vs West' notion represented the primary contextual cause invoked to explain Islamophobia.

Economic Factors:

Apart from cultural factors, there are main economic factors which have contributed towards the rise of populism in Western Europe. Long-term economic developments clearly matter. In particular, the loss of secure, reasonably well paying jobs often, though not always in manufacturing have left many people without secure jobs or incomes. The kind of incomes on which they could comfortably raise a family and there is clear evidence that those economic circumstances, are closely related to support for populist parties. But note that those who are worse off in economic terms, tend to gravitate towards parties of the radical left, while those who vote for parties or candidates of the populist right, tend to be a few runs up the economic or social ladder and in some sense the researcher thinks worried about falling farther down that ladder.

Right populism in particular is not the immediate economic circumstances of their household, but rather a sense that they and their children no longer have the opportunities that they once thought they could expect and they are not entirely wrong about that. These people's complaints are not so much about their personal household circumstances, as they are about the direction of society as a whole. For them, something that we could think of as a social contract is unraveling.

1. Wage Stagnation

From political economy perspective, wage stagnation in developed world was caused by neoliberal financialisation and trade liberalization. The Great Recession of late 2000s marked a high-profile moment in the phenomenal rise of populism. National publics were adamant that guilty parties that were responsible for the recession should be punished. However, the imposition of scarcely legal sanctions against financial executive resulted in further angering national publics that were already distressed with the structural flaws of modern economy. Furthermore, traditional parties are blamed for corruption and recession in the first place and shielding bankers from serious consequences. Similarly, party systems that existed for decades are crumbling down. The Brussels-based EU bureaucracy is another targeting point in the narrative of populist political resentment.

2. Loss of Manufacturing Jobs

The most direct effects of lost manufacturing jobs are economic. The rising unemployment causes decline in wages. The manufacturing wage premiums are high. Workers in the manufacturing sector earn high wages due to their high education as compared to workers of other sectors. Similarly, the closure of one local plant leads towards the suffering of associated businesses.

3. Growing Inequality

French economist Thomas Piketty argues that inequality and populism is linked. The historical data from France, Britain and the United States suggest that left-wing parties, which in the past attracted less educated voters are now associating themselves with highly educated voters. On the other hand, right wing parties traditionally attract and represent wealthy voters. Consequently, less educated and low income voters feel abandoned. In brief, the rise of populism is related to what Piketty calls “the rise of elitism”.

Corruption and Rise of Populism:

Many populist leaders left and right wing populists have deployed the rhetoric of anti-corruption as a significant feature of their campaigns, and many people have attributed the emphasis on that issue at least part of the appeal of these populist movements. In the United States, Donald Trump's 'drain the swamp' campaign slogan is probably the most familiar but individuals like

Viktor Orban in Hungary and Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines and numerous others, have talked very explicitly about corruption. The idea that the existing elite or the existing government is corrupt and that one of the reasons to give power to these populist leaders or movements is a sense that the existing political elites are so thoroughly corrupt or have so failed to solve these deep rooted corruption problems, that the populist alternative starts to seem more appealing.

Economic inequality, for example, seems to have broadly speaking in the data, a correlation with corruption. The frequency of macroeconomic crises seems to be associated with widespread corruption. People feeling like they do not have adequate access to health care or education, or that their jobs are insecure or that the only people who can get good, stable jobs are those who are well-connected or pay bribes, are the sorts of things that might contribute to the appeal of populist leaders. So for this reason, there is I think a plausible hypothesis that failing to address systemic, entrenched corruption in a society may lay the groundwork for the rise of these kinds of populist leaders or movements.

Corruption has to do less with the rise of populism and what happens once the populist movement or leader gets into power. The researcher believes that it would not be a terribly surprising observation to anyone that many of these populist leaders, whether or not they ran on a drain the swamp kind of platform, are not exactly paragons of integrity. Whether we are talking about Berlusconi in Italy or Orban in Hungary or Thaksin in Thailand or the Kirchners in Argentina or Donald Trump in the United States. Very often you see these people engage in really substantial corruption of their own which raises a puzzle why does not this behavior alienate the supporters of the populist movement more? If what they are really upset about is the idea that a well-connected, entrenched elite is unfairly benefiting without exhibiting the virtues of hard work and so forth, and the system is rigged, why is not the Kirchners or Thaksin or Trump benefiting their families and their cronies the ultimate expression of that corruption that the populists are allegedly really upset about?

Even though people say they do not like corruption, they might in some perverse way admire the charismatic populist leader who seems to be living the kind of life that they wish they could lead, if only they could. Again, to come back to Italy, there is apparently a lot of evidence that Italian voters thought that a lot of what Berlusconi did and a lot of the way he behaved, including all of his mistresses, was at least to Italian men, considered like he is leaving his dream. Apparently Trump has a similar appeal with many Americans and it relates to the earlier point that sometimes the more one criticizes the vulgarity, and the lack of integrity and so on and so forth, it can end up leading to this dynamic where people who actually identify with that person experience these attacks as attacks on them. Saying that they are bad people, too and it does seem to be, though, this strange paradox and I do not have the answer, but I hope it will be part of our conversation going forward where voters generally, and the supporters of populist movements in particular, will tell you that they care deeply about corruption, that one of the real

reasons they are drawn to these outsiders is the feeling that they have to do something to clean up the systemic corruption of the system. But they do not seem to be bothered by what seems like pretty clear and convincing evidence of drastic corruption by these leaders themselves and it is a real puzzle about how these shyster are able to pull it off.

Conclusion:

The researcher has been able to conclude that populism has able to make ingress in Western Europe. However, it has not impacted Western European countries in a way as it has impacted other parts of Europe. While introspecting the causes behind the rise of populism in Western Europe, the researcher came to the conclusion that both cultural and economic factors contributed greatly in rising tendency of populism.

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