

Democracy and populism

Main questions

- What is the relationship of populism and democracy?
- Is populism dangerous to democracy?

Outline

1. What is democracy?
2. The two faces of democracy
3. Populism – threat or corrective to democracy?

What is democracy?

Democracy

- Popular sovereignty
- Majority rule
- Schumpeter (1949: 250): ‘institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote’; *representative democracy, a method of selection of rulers, free and fair elections*

Populism

“populism as a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde, 2007)

- Populism supports popular sovereignty and majority rule

Populism and democracy - discussion

Why so much discussion on the relationship between populism and democracy?

Is populism dangerous to democracy? Why?

Democracy

- Popular sovereignty
- Majority rule
- Schumpeter (1949: 250): ‘institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote’; *representative democracy*, a *method* of selection of rulers, free and fair elections
- Most contemporary democracies are *liberal*

What makes a democracy to be a liberal one?

Liberal democracy

- Contested concept
- Robert Dahl`s approach – widely accepted
- Democracy X polyarchy
- Two key dimensions of polyarchies:
 - Public contestation
 - Political participation
- Emphasis put on ‘checks and balances’ – separation of powers and gaurantee against a tyranny by majorities
- Inclusion and political participation as important elements of p.

Polyarchy

1. Freedom to form and join organization
2. Freedom of expression
3. Right to vote
4. Right of political leaders to compete for votes
5. Eligibility for public office
6. Alternative sources of information
7. Free and fair elections
8. Institutions for making government policies dependent on votes and other expressions of preference

Key features of liberal democracy

- Free and fair elections
 - Popular sovereignty
 - Majority rule
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- Checks and balances and the constitutional protection of minority rights
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- Democracy as a set of ideas AND/OR rules of game

Two faces of democracy

- Canovan (1999) – two faces of democracy:
 - Oakeshott: politics of faith and politics of scepticism -> redemptive and pragmatic face of democracy
 - Redemptive face – ‘salvation through politics’, direct exercise of power
 - Pragmatic face – ‘ballots, not bullets’, a way of peaceful resolution of conflicts, a form of government, and institutions and rules
- C. Mouffe – a liberal/constitutional pillar & democratic pillar
- Ideal of democracy vs. Real functioning – *permanent* internal tension between the two faces of democracy
- Populist appeal refers (only) to the redemptive face of democracy vs. principles of *liberal* democracy

Democratic tension as a breeding ground for populism

- „A broad tendency that is always latent to some degree in modern democracies“ (Plattner, 2010)
- „If it becomes clear that those involved see in democracy nothing but horsetrading, they, and eventually the system itself, are liable to lose their legitimacy. When too **great a gap opens up between haloed democracy and the grubby business of politics**, populists tend to move on to the vacant territory, promising in place of the dirty world of party manoeuvring the shining ideal of democracy renewed.“ (Canovan 1999: 11).
- Populism as a ‘shadow of democracy’, democracy/political crisis as a (possible explanation of the rise of populism x different kind of populisms)

Populism as a threat to democracy I.

- Democracy seen by populist only as the ‘power of the people’ – reductionist definition of democracy (Mény, Surel, 2002)
- ‘democratic illiberalism’ (Pappas, 2012)
- ‘pure populist democracy vs. the practice of *constitutional* democracy’ (Abts, Rummens, 2007)
- ‘little patience with liberalism’s emphasis on procedural niceties and protections for individual rights’ (Plattner, 2010)
- Populism is not against democracy *per se*, but against the principles of liberal/representative democracy

Populism as a threat to democracy II.

- Negative effects on different aspects of democracy:

1. Position of individuals and social groups

- Rejection of the *unified-in-diversity* vision of society
- Circumvention of minority rights in the name of majority rule/majority rights
- Ignorance of constitutional guarantees for the individual rights of citizens
- Pluralism at stake with populism

Populism as a threat to democracy III.

2. Institutions and rules of liberal democracy

- System of 'checks and balances', a complex model of bargaining, compromises in contrast with populist vision of democracy
- Delegitimization of institutions necessary for 'good governance'
- 'Solutions':
 - By-passing of representative principles of liberal democracy by promotion of elements of direct democracy
 - Limitation of separation of powers, weakening of 'pluralist' institutions (parliaments, opposition rights, discussion, constitutional courts...)
 - Delegation of elected bodies, replacing by 'non-political' principles

Populism as a threat to democracy IV.

3. Effectiveness of political processes

- Indirect effect related mostly to democracy support
- Limited coalition potential of populist parties – formation of ideologically non-connected coalitions (a new political cleavage - Greece) – convergence of political space – growing dissatisfaction with democracy (lack of representativeness)
- Formation of ‘populist democracies’ (Pappas) – reaction to success of populist rhetoric, populist inflation
- Populists in government – ‘mainstreamization’, lack of trust, ‘spiral of discontent’ – clash of a programme of redemptive democracy and the practice of pragmatic democracy
- Drop of legitimacy of standard institutions of liberal democracy (intentional delegitimation)

Populism as a corrective to democracy

- Populist success as a litmus paper of pragmatism of democracy
- Corrective function of populism (Mudde, Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012)
- Mostly related to the inclusionist face of populism:
 1. Representation of 'silent majority'
 2. Mobilization and representation of excluded sections of population (issues important for this part of society but neglected by political representation)
 3. Increase of democratic accountability – new issues in the *political* agenda
 4. 'Democratisation of democracy' – related to mobilization, revitalization/intensification of political conflicts

Conclusion

- Populism based on basic principles of democracy (the essence of populism *is* democratic)
- Different faces of democracy: idea/practice of democracy – liberal democracy
- Three faces of populism:
 1. *Latent and permanent* danger to *liberal* democracy
 2. *Possible* corrective to liberal democracy
 3. Litmus paper of functioning of democracy (demand)
- Empirical investigation needed, case studies (presentations?)