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# Populismul in Western Europe after the financial crisis from 2007-2011. A comparison between UK and France

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**ABSTRACT**

The fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, coupled with the prospects of the enlargement of the European Union to the former communist States, has created a sensation among intellectuals of the permanence of democracy and of the "end of history". However, the lack of necessary reforms at the economic level due to the fear of electoral effects has led to worsening socio-economic situations in which part of the society was located. Thus, the lack of these reforms would trigger the economic crisis in 2007, an event that would reveal the extent of the disparity of systemic problems in society. Attempts at late intervention led to riots, changes in government, and ultimately eroding trust in politicians. Benefiting from a favorable context as a result of social discontent, politicians not very relevant in the `90 were expected to gain more and more popular support and began to influence more and more the political game. Thus, politicians like Nigel Farage or Marine Le Pen are starting to count more and more in the British and French political game, the most important event being the Brexit of 2012 and the arrival of Le Pen in the second round of the presidential elections in France. The extent of these phenomena, which presented a specific form of language, would be called populism.

Given the increasing importance of political personalities of this aspect, especially after the financial crisis, this paper aims to provide some theoretical clarifications on how populism manifests itself, reasons of electoral attractiveness to it and last but not least, possible solutions to mitigate the impact of populism on society.

**Keywords:** populism, rhetoric, needs, identity, multiculturalism, hate speech, conflict, democracy.
SUMMARY

This research thesis aims to provide a contextualization of the events that made populism a relevant political movement following the economic crisis of 2007 and its consequences. The process of contextualization is accompanied by a theoretical presentation on the existence of forms of populism, ways of action and discursive modalities.

It was chosen as a landmark period after the financial crisis, namely 2007-2011 considering that the financial crisis was the determining factor in increasing support for populist politicians. Thus, the choice of the case study, namely British and French populism, is decisive for the fact that these models of populism were and still are the most successful models of populism in Europe. In this respect, the relevance of British populism is given by the presence of Nigel Farage with his rhetorical style that led to Britain's exit from the EU, The influence of the Scottish National Party which attempted a similar move to that of UKIP by trying to get Scotland out of the UK and last but not least, by Plaid Cymru from Wales trying to start a referendum similar to that of Scotland.

With regard to the French case, its importance lies in the continuous growth of the phenomenon after the Jean-Marie Le Pen period, French populism being a model of populism with important relevance to France before British populism.

Thus, in order to analyze populism, this paper aims to identify and analyze the main causes that have made populism a real alternative to the current globalized society, to define the concept of populism as well as its mode of operation and last but not least, to offer solutions to stop the rise of this increasingly frequent phenomenon. Specifically, the novelty of the research will be to identify the necessary methods for stopping populism based on Ernesto Laclau's hypothesis[1] that populism is a reaction of a part of society as a result of certain social needs not being solved, and thus certain social groups feel marginalized. In this regard, it should be noted that the vast majority of the solutions to mitigate the impact of populism are based on its approach as a discursive style and thus the approaches used concern the construction of an alternative discourse,[2] regaining

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[1] Ernesto Laclau, Populism: What is a Name?, London, Routledge, 2014, pp. 78-81.
[2] Jose Javier Olivas Osuna, "From chasing populists to deconstructing populism: A new multidimensional approach to understanding and comparing populism", European Journal of Political Research, no. 60, 2021, pp. 841-845, disponibil la https://ejpr.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1475-6765.12428, accesat în data de 1 decembrie 2021.

public trust by involving citizens in decision-making as part of participatory democracy.[3] However, given that the populist movement arises as a result of social discontent, then we can consider that the most effective way to stop the populist growth margin is to identify the best methods for solving social crises. Of course, it is necessary to strengthen the elements that make a society a functional democracy such as civic spirit or social involvement, but these elements used in the singular way will maintain the antagonism between the camps of society.

The main objective of the paper is to demonstrate that there is a unified discourse on populism in order to attract the support of the masses. Thus, starting from the assumption that a populist discourse contains the following elements that must be fully fulfilled, namely xenophobia, racism, lies or forms of manipulation, the appeal to the glorious past of the country or of a culture, and last but not least, the reference to an obvious problem of an economic nature, social or political which will be the central point that generates the development, respectively the amplification of the speech.

More specifically, this last aspect will be the enemy of the people, identified as the foreigner who is considered to endanger jobs, the foreigner who causes theft, migration or any other element that threatens the purity of culture. It is important to note that this last element differs depending on the economic, social and cultural specifics of each society.

The secondary objective of the study will be to show that populism involves a type of speech needed to attract popular support given its use by political leaders, who are part of both political parties traditionally considered democratic. and more radical parties.

In order to try to define the concept of populism after reviewing the literature, Ernesto Laclau's theory will be the basis for defining and understanding the way populism manifests and forms.

The third objective of the study will be to propose solutions to stop populism starting from the central topics of discussion present in the populist messages in counterbalance to the solutions proposed later that stop only on increasing the level of political participation through exercises of participatory budgetary type and not on the premise that although populism exaggerates the way

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[3] Steven Blockmans, "Participatory fusion: How to galvanise representative democracy with deliberative tools", în Steven Blockmans și Sophia Russack (eds.), Deliberative Democracy in the EU Countering Populism with Participation and Debate, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020, pp. 357-379.

it presents the problems, they are a reality and must be solved in a manner specific to liberal democracy.

As a research methodology, the proof of the thesis that there is a discourse with unitary and specific elements will be made on the basis of discourse analysis, interviews, official releases, both in a simplistic manner, and compared by referring to another speech with mentioning the specific elements that are found in both cases.

Analyzing and demonstrating elements that may constitute untrue or manipulative elements will be done through a fact-checking analysis, which will be done according to the model created by PolitiFact.[4]

Research questions:

What is populism and what are its defining characteristics?

What are the causes of the revitalization of the populist movement post-financial crisis?

How does he manifest himself?

What means of propagation does he use and what forms of speech does he wear?

Why is it successful?

What are the target groups which he addresses?

What does a portrait of the populist voter look like?

The research questions will find their answer based on the study of the literature in terms of populism theorizing, in this respect, a central role having the works of Ernesto Laclau, discourse analysis to identify the theoretical elements found at the level of the discourse and last but not least, based on the analysis of how he operates at national level, especially in the UK and France.

In its form, the work is structured on 8 chapters starting from the presentation and analysis of the causes that led to the rise of populism, the presentation and analysis of literature that provides theoretical elements on populism and not in the last place the application of the relevant theoretical elements in order to understand British and French populism. The end of the paper is dedicated to proposing solutions to reduce the impact of populism starting from its central discourse themes, specifically proposing actions on the labor market, at the level of the education system and encouraging civic participation.

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[4] Metodologie fact-cheking PolitiFact, disponibilă la https://www.politifact.com/article/2018/feb/12/principles-truth-o-meter-politifacts-methodology-i/, accesat în data de 4 octombrie 2019.

The first chapter entitled *Introduction to the study* is intended to contextualize populism in the sense of identifying the causes that led to its increased relevance, arguing the chosen study period and last but not least, the difficulties but also the elements that make populism a difficult topic to analyse as a result of the multitude of theories and concepts that hover on the subject.

The next chapter entitled *The Global World* starts from the situation created by the economic crisis of 2007 as a generator of discontent at the level of society that provided a series of means of growth for populism. Thus, the chapter considers that the financial crisis has brought to the surface a number of social appointments as a result of their failure to resolve them over time and thus the beginning of challenging the idea of multiculturalism considered as a risk factor for jobs, but also for the public security, being considered a facilitator for terrorism.

The chapter entitled *Politics and Democracy* presents an evolutionary study of democracy starting from democracy in ancient Greece given the narrative that the Athenian model is a solution to the political crisis. However, during the chapter we find that there is a limitation of political participation in Athenian political life. Thus, there is an evolutionary process of democracy from the classical model to the change of the way of doing politics due to the importance of social networks, an argument supported by analysing the impact of Cambridge Analytica in the context of the Brexit referendum. Thus, given the change in the way of doing politics, there will be some cases of citizen involvement in political life, namely situations of participatory democracy in the UK and France.

The chapter *Theories of the populist discourse* presents the main theories regarding the classification and understanding of populism as a mode of action through the prism of authors such as Gino Germans, Edward shils, Margaret Canovan, Ghita Ionesco, Ernest Gellner, Yves Mény and Yves Surel. In this chapter will be analyzed the vision of Ernesto Laclau the concepts of the Argentine author underlying the understanding and analysis of populism in this paper. Thus, it will be analyzed how populism crystallizes at the beginning, considering itself as unresolved social crises, how to articulate social problems in terms of creating a group identity, characteristics of populist language in articulating a group identity and in order to increase the number of supporters, last but not least, the role of the leader in the question of group identity and the success of populism.

The chapter entitled *Populism in Great Britain* will analyze through the prism of Ernesto Laclau's theory the operation of populism in the case of England, Scotland and Wales, in the light of the speeches proposed on various occasions in this regard, the central events will be the Brexit

referendum and the Scottish independence referendum. It will also look at how populism operates during the Covid-19 pandemic, given the predisposition of populism to use crises to gain support and future prospects. In addition, this chapter will also present a history of populism in order to identify the key events that led to the success of British populism with Nigel Farage as the leader.

The chapter *Populism in France* will present a brief history of French populism, continuing with the steady growth of the Marine Le Pen period. Thus, during the chapter will be presented the discursive terminology of Marie Le Pen's daughter and how it differs from British rhetoric. Thus, the way of action will be analyzed during the presidential elections of 2012, 2017 and 2022, the approach during the co-19 pandemic by politicians such as Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Marine Le Pen. The outlook for growth will also be analysed following the results of the 2022 election and conspiracy theories during the health crisis considered to have similar potential as the financial crisis from 2007.

The last chapter, *Remedies to diminish the effects of populism,* will start from Ernesto Laclau's analysis that there is an unresolved social crisis or need at the root of the rise in populism. Considering that the majority of the academic approach that proposes limiting the effects of populism by increasing civic involvement and proposing an alternative discourse, The paper aims as a novelty to limit the populist effects starting from Laclau's theory and populist rhetoric more precisely by addressing the main topics of discussion present in the populist discourse, namely the problem of jobs, wages, the problem of migration and the need for integration and the need for changes in the education system.

The need for labor market measures is demonstrated from the need to address these problems in order to prevent social problems. Thus, as a solution, the European Commission's renewable energy strategy will be based, namely the chapter proposing the transition to electric cars by 2055. Given the advanced term, a number of investments are needed to support an electric car market, namely the need to lower the price of electricity by producing other renewable energy sources, investments in the automotive industry. These objectives require major invitations and involve a number of labor market effects through the emergence of new jobs with attractive pay, thus requiring the training of qualified staff by the assumed date. Thus, as a result of social problems, a process of training can be initiated for those in vulnerable areas, with reduced education and skills in order to apply to the new positions available.

The wage approach is linked to the targets assumed by the European Commission and believes that new jobs created with high added value will be adequately paid and thus those from disadvantaged groups will want to qualify for them and will also solve the problem of insufficient pay for those who are poor people, even though they have a job. This sub-chapter will also propose the benefits of universal basic income to support the vulnerable.

The sub-chapter on migration and integration starts from the need to integrate them in order to stop the radicalisation present in France at the level of prisons that are mostly populated by people of Islamic religion. Thus, means of control are proposed in order to prevent the use of religion as a factor of radicalisation, but rather by using it as an instrument of integration into society. It also aims to stop discrimination in employment on religious grounds.

The last part for education proposes a change in the approach to learning as a result of the increasing influence of conspiracy theories. Thus, measures such as assessing students based on solving problems using the Internet are proposed. We also want to increase civic engagement.

The conclusions chapter discusses the prospect of increasing populism in general as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on jobs, the growing role of conspiracy theories and thus the possibility of a similarity to the 2007 economic crisis. In addition to the role of the pandemic, at the level of France there is a constant influence of Marine Le Pen following the results of 2022 and the possible results of the upcoming parliamentary elections.

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