

## SECTION 8. TRENDS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

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### QUANTITATIVE DIMENSIONS OF POPULISM: TRENDS, CHALLENGES, AND APPLICATIONS

### КІЛЬКІСНІ ВИМІРИ ПОПУЛІЗМУ: ТЕНДЕНЦІЇ, ВИКЛИКИ ТА ЗАСТОСУВАННЯ

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The rise of populism has become a significant phenomenon in global politics, influencing numerous electoral outcomes and reshaping political landscapes. Populism, characterized by its emphasis on the dichotomy between the ‘pure’ people and the ‘corrupt’ elite, has manifested across various political spectrums and geographical regions. This paper explores the quantitative dimensions of populism, examining trends, challenges, and applications of its measurement.

Populism is generally defined by its core characteristics: anti-elitism, people-centrism, and a moralistic imagination of politics. These features highlight the conflict between the general populace, perceived as virtuous and homogeneous, and the elite, viewed as corrupt and self-serving [1]. Theoretical frameworks on populism vary, with Mudde conceptualizing it as a ‘thin-centered ideology’ and Müller emphasizing its ‘moralistic imagination’ [2, 3].

Several instruments have been developed to measure populist attitudes quantitatively. Akkerman, Mudde, and Zaslove’s scale, for instance, utilizes a one-dimensional approach to assess the degree of populist sentiments among individuals. This scale has been widely used and validated, providing a straightforward measure of populist attitudes [4]. More recently, Schulz proposed a three-dimensional scale that captures anti-elitism, support for unrestricted popular sovereignty, and belief in the homogeneity and virtuousness of the people. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of populism by distinguishing between its different dimensions [5].

Content analysis is another method used to measure populism. Traditional approaches involve human coders systematically analyzing texts such as party manifestos and speeches for populist content. This method, while detailed, can be time-consuming and subject to coder bias. To address these issues, computer-based content analysis has emerged as a valuable tool, employing automated text analysis to process large volumes of text and identify populist themes through pre-defined dictionaries. This method has been applied to various contexts, including the speeches of political leaders like Recep Tayyip Erdoğan [6].

Ensuring the reliability and validity of populism measurement tools is crucial. Psychometric validation techniques such as factor analysis and calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficients help in verifying the internal consistency and structural validity of the scales used. For example, Schulz's three-dimensional scale was validated through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, confirming its robust structure and reliability [7].

Empirical studies indicate that populism is more prevalent in certain regions, particularly Latin America and parts of Europe. Countries like Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador have exhibited high levels of populist rhetoric and sentiment, often linked to charismatic leadership and socio-political upheaval. In Europe, populist parties have gained significant traction in countries like Italy, Hungary, and Poland, where they have capitalized on issues such as immigration, economic inequality, and distrust in traditional political institutions [8].

Populist rhetoric has evolved over time, adapting to changing political contexts. For example, Erdoğan's speeches from 2004 to 2018 reveal a shift from a predominantly people-centric discourse to a more pronounced anti-elitist and moralistic rhetoric during periods of political crisis and electoral campaigns. Initially, Erdoğan's rhetoric focused on uniting the people and emphasizing national sovereignty. However, as political challenges and opposition grew, his speeches increasingly incorporated anti-elitist themes and a moralistic dichotomy between the virtuous people and the corrupt elites [6].

One major challenge in measuring populism is the lack of a universally accepted definition. Different scholars emphasize various aspects of populism, leading to inconsistencies in measurement approaches and difficulties in comparing results across studies. For instance, while some definitions focus on populism as an ideology, others view it as a political strategy or communication style. This variability complicates the development of standardized measurement tools and the interpretation of findings [9].

The selection of sources and coding reliability are critical issues in content analysis. Traditional methods rely on human coders, which can introduce subjectivity and inconsistency. Computer-based methods, while

addressing some of these issues, may struggle with contextual nuances, especially in agglutinating languages like Turkish. Ensuring the accuracy and reliability of coding remains a significant challenge, requiring ongoing refinement of dictionaries and coding protocols [10].

Applying a single measurement tool across diverse political and cultural contexts poses significant challenges. Instruments must be adapted to local contexts to ensure their relevance and accuracy, which can complicate cross-national comparisons. For example, the psychometric properties of populism scales may vary across different cultural settings, necessitating validation studies in each context. Additionally, political and historical factors unique to each country can influence how populism is expressed and perceived, further complicating measurement efforts [7].

Quantitative measures of populism can predict electoral outcomes by identifying the prevalence of populist attitudes among the electorate. Studies have shown that higher scores on populist attitude scales correlate with support for populist candidates. For instance, Schulz et al.'s three-dimensional scale has been used to predict voting behavior in various contexts, demonstrating its utility in electoral studies. Understanding the distribution of populist attitudes can help forecast election results and the potential success of populist movements [5].

Measuring populist rhetoric and sentiments can help assess the impact of populist policies on governance and democracy. This analysis is crucial for understanding how populist leaders shape policy agendas and the long-term implications for democratic institutions. For example, studies have examined the impact of populist policies on areas such as immigration, economic redistribution, and institutional reforms, providing insights into the practical consequences of populist governance [11].

Quantitative measures enable comparative studies of populism across different countries and time periods. These studies provide insights into the factors driving populism and its effects on political systems worldwide, facilitating a deeper understanding of this complex phenomenon. For example, cross-national studies have compared the rise of populist movements in Europe and Latin America, identifying common factors such as economic crises, political corruption, and cultural backlash. These comparative analyses help identify patterns and variations in populist movements, contributing to the broader field of political science [12].

Quantitative approaches to measuring populism offer valuable insights into its prevalence, evolution, and impact. Despite challenges such as definition ambiguities and methodological issues, these measures are essential for predicting electoral outcomes, analyzing policy impacts, and conducting comparative studies. Future research should focus on refining measurement tools and exploring new applications to enhance our understanding of populism in contemporary politics. By addressing the

challenges and leveraging the strengths of quantitative methods, researchers can contribute to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of populism and its implications for global democracy.

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