

Semiperipheral populists as decision makers in international relations: ideational structures and practices

The goal of this project is to study populist governments in semiperipheries as decision makers in international relations. It will look at both populists' worldviews concerning international relations and their diplomatic practices.

Populism is understood here as an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite'. The groups are considered homogenous and, at the same time, in conflict with each other. Scholars often call populism a 'thin-centered ideology', which means that it can be combined with other ideologies, like for example socialism or nationalism. However, populism has some distinct features which we want to study.

Historically populists have usually been in opposition, apart from Latin America which has a long history of populists in power. In recent decade this has been changing and in more and more countries populists are winning elections and become decision makers in state institutions. Even if essentially populists have relatively little to say about foreign affairs, while in executive government offices they need to develop their ideologies to include more international issues as they become involved in diplomatic practices.

We chose to study populists in power rather than in opposition because, first and foremost, being in power pushes populists to be more interested and engaged in IR. Consequently, being in power is sometimes said to work as a reality check for populist narratives and promises. This fundamental choice prompts us to focus on semiperipheral states because in the core liberal democracies populists have been in government relatively rarely.

Our research framework assumes that ideas influence behavior of decision-makers, including in the critical cases when vital security interests are at stake.

We will use qualitative methodology to answer two broad research questions:

- a/ What are the IS guiding FP decisions of semiperipheral populist governments?
- b/ What are the FP practices of semiperipheral populist governments?

Our team will conduct one hundred individual in-depth interviews with experts on populism and foreign policy. The interviews will be conducted in five different languages. We will also collect and analyze hundreds of documents and statement produced by populist leaders and government agencies in five different languages.

Given the fact that problem of populist foreign policy is severely understudied in international literature, this project is likely to bring considerable contribution to existing knowledge about international relations, foreign policy, and populism.