

Guest Editors' Introduction to the Thematic Issue

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The Use of Emotions in Populism

To explain the rise of populism, social scientists have employed various theories and concepts which could shed light on this pressing issue. For instance, they have claimed that the increase in globalization has caused groups, who feel left out, to turn to populist parties. Globalization limits the kinds of policies that mainstream politicians think they can implement, therefore the differences between the socioeconomic policies of the mainstream parties have decreased. This makes many voters feel there is no important difference between parties, which induces them to look for populist alternatives.

With the rise of populist movements, there has been an increasing tendency to bring emotions into the analysis of societal developments. The previously dominating rational choice paradigms emphasized the calculations of actors, in which people try to maximize their outcomes based on their preferences. Theorists coming from the sociology of emotions school have shown, however, that without emotions we cannot have preferences (e.g. Barbalet, 1998). Consequently, the sociology of emotions can even help us understand social and political developments even if the main actors (politicians, social movement leaders, etc.) make quite logical, rational arguments. When it comes to most populist leaders, it is hard to deny that emotions are an important factor in their attempts to gain support, as their emotional appeals play a direct role in their mobilizing strategies.

In line with the argument about globalization's losers, theorists of emotions have claimed that losers turn to populist parties because they feel resentment toward those groups, whom they think have benefitted from government policies (e.g. Abramowitz – McCoy 2019). Among the post-communist countries, some groups feel resentment toward groups, whom they perceive have benefitted more than others from policies that governments carried out after the collapse of the previous regime or from policies linked to the EU membership, such as policies supporting gay rights or the rights of immigrants (Bušíková 2014, 2020). Ethnopopulists, for example, have been able to play on people's fears by portraying immigrants as a threat to the country's (or the European continent's) security (Kazharski – Tabosa 2018).

Social scientists writing about elections have also begun to examine the role of negative emotions such as anger and fear and positive emotions such as hope and pride when it comes to the ability of political leaders (both populist and non-populist) to attract voters. Other scholars have made great inroads in the

discourse on (populist) social movements by pointing out that people are more likely to join protests if they feel anger or outrage (Saxonberg 2001), “moral shock” (Polletta – Amenta 2001) or “moral outrage” (Jasper 1997), than because of rational calculations.

In our special issue *The Use of Emotions in Populism*, five studies examine these intersections in a wide variety of contexts. They apply different empirical approaches using sociological as well as broader, interdisciplinary concepts to identify the role of emotions in populist movements and political parties¹.

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