

POPULISM AND ACCOUNTABILITY: INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCHES ON ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP, EDITED BY ANTONIO MARIA BAGGIO, MARIA-GABRIELLA BALDARELLI, AND SAMUEL O. IDOWU. SPRINGER, CHAM, 2023. XVIII, 325 PP. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-20032-8>.

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Abstract

This book comparatively analyzes various forms of populism in countries with democratic political systems and regimes. In various chapters, the authors draw attention to the common elements of populism that have already emerged: the desire for political representation, a charismatic leader, a nationalist idealization of the historical role of ‘the people’, criticism of the EU, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and international law. In this book, various authors point out that populist phenomena are used to destroy both the tools and the rules and culture of democracy. Most populist political parties gain widespread acceptance among young people because of their extreme views and statements, thereby calling for the abandonment of democratic principles, that is, the political order and the rule of law. In this book, the authors use an interdisciplinary approach to highlight the importance of political and social accountability and responsibility, examining the major challenges facing current and future corporate leaders. In its various chapters, the authors propose counter-populist approaches for effectively measuring political and socially responsible action and accountability. In this context, the authors offer tools to combat the causes of populism in both the political and social spheres, as well as in business.

Keywords: populism, political representation, active citizenship, accountability, direct democracy, civil responsibility, social responsible action, nationalistic idealization.

In the various chapters of this book, the authors analyze the factors of populism and accountability from a new perspective, based on interdisciplinary research on active citizenship. After numerous electoral successes, as well as failures, of right-wing populist parties, the authors of the chapters of this book see that the influence of right-

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wing populism on European politics cannot be underestimated. This is especially evident in the context of the migration crisis, which continues to irritate the right-wing populist electorate, the wave of terrorist attacks in Western Europe, the problems of the functioning of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), also exploited by populists, and the referendum on the UK leaving the EU. Consequently, there is an urgent need to improve the theoretical and empirical basis of research on right-wing populism and to fill the existing gaps in the study of this phenomenon, which is so important for understanding the functioning of modern European polities.

The authors of the chapters in this book consider it necessary to take political parties as a unit of measurement in this study, since this phenomenon is most clearly manifested in the institutional, party field. Of course, right-wing populism can also be considered in a more abstract context of political philosophy and the theory of ideologies, but in this case the subject and object of the study become poorly visible and go beyond the scope of our interest (Baggio 2023; Fioravante and Baldo 2023).

In various chapters of this book, on the one hand, the terms ‘populism’, ‘accountability’ and ‘active citizenship’ are very popular in academic and journalistic discourse, so some researchers even write about populist hype, and also warn against labeling all parties that we do not like for one reason or another, or all political outsiders, as populist (Baldarelli 2023; Tosetto 2023; Giusta 2023). But on the other hand, when considering examples of truly populist parties, a number of authors are faced with the question of how to justify their classification as populist parties in general, as right-wing and left-wing populists in particular, how individual right-wing populist ideologemes relate to other entrenched concepts, such as nationalism, radicalism, Euroscepticism. Therefore, a critical analysis of the above-mentioned problems, including specific examples, seems relevant for political science, which was undertaken in various chapters of this book (Barbaro 2023; Ropelato 2023; Cardillo 2023; Parolin 2023).

An analysis of the contradictory processes of the political system of the EU and EU member states, as well as democratization taking place in modern EaP countries, allows us to conclude that it is necessary to include in the legal system effective mechanisms of control over the use of democratic institutions for selfish purposes. In everyday reality, the dissemination of the values of freedom and democracy often gives rise to the abuse of information channels for influencing public opinion, leads to political and legal demagoguery, which has replaced effective mechanisms for ensuring legality, law and order and legal regulation in general (Deponte 2023; Gaudiano 2023; Vignini 2023). The emergence of democratic institutions and mechanisms designed to implement the will of the people gives an opportunity to individual participants in the political process, using modern technologies of manipulation of consciousness, to realize their selfish interests without formally violating the law (Idowu 2023). As a result, the goals of economic growth, improving the welfare of citizens, and combating corruption proclaimed at the beginning of the reforms have not brought any positive changes to life. Appealing to the mistakes of modernization reforms, the leaders of opposition movements of the EU political system, EU member states and EaP countries, under the slogans of fighting for the rights of the people, conduct anti-democratic actions against the legally elected authorities. For example, the rights of

citizens enshrined in the Constitutions of the EU member states and EaP countries in fact turn out to be formal, illusory, since they remain largely at the level of promises and declarations. Identifying and eliminating such barriers to building a social legal state in these countries seems to be an extremely important problem of modern political science.

Recently, along with the persistence of a number of crisis phenomena, a positive character of transformations has emerged, largely due to the implementation of sustainable development projects. Undoubtedly, this is the result of long and persistent work in the social sphere, which will be used by citizens and CSOs of these countries. However, a significant leap aimed at improving the quality of life of citizens of these countries can be made if the steps developed by the legislative and executive authorities do not contain features of populism, despite the fact that there is some negative experience of encountering this phenomenon. Legal demagogy and political populism hinder the implementation of tasks on the implementation of the main goals of sustainable development. The study of these phenomena will allow us to determine ways to optimize the legal policy of the EU member states and the EaP countries, and the current legislation to increase the effectiveness of legal regulation, as well as to consolidate the efforts of the state and society in achieving the priority goals of sustainable development, building a democratic political system.

The contradictory nature of populist thinking gives researchers a reason to deny it an ideology or to point out its desire to sit on all chairs at once. The ideological weakness of populism lies in the fact that it can use various political content and, in addition, is subject to the danger of becoming dependent on strong ideologies such as national socialism or socialism, the content of which it uses. Against this point of view is the fact that populism today, as a rule, is right-wing. The connection between populism and right-wing political thinking is that populism is based on individual social responsibility (Aleksanyan and Aleksanyan 2024). On the one hand, they demand a strong state capable of protecting little people from the tyranny of corporations, unions, bureaucracy of all stripes, but, on the other hand, this state should be as little noticeable to citizens as possible (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2021).

Political populism does not weaken its ideological quality. Any ideology operating within a democratic system is forced to reconcile individual freedom with social integration. The individualist criterion applies above all to the economic sphere. The protest is directed against the irresponsible abuse of freedom, understood only as freedom of private property; the need for mutual support and concern for the public good is emphasized. The dilemma of populist politics becomes obvious when market principles and the interests of the public good come into conflict, for example, in economic policy. The more economic populism leans toward liberalism, the more it is forced to turn to such old connecting elements as a common national identity or a common religion. And if the construction of a common identity is carried out along negative criteria by dissociating oneself from others, then the radicalization of the ideological content is not excluded: a consensus of values turns into intolerance, fear of foreign influence into racism, demands for an active foreign policy into nationalism. The ideology of the new populist right replaces previous claims to national superiority with positions of ethnic and cultural particularism, recognizing the right of all races

and peoples to their own identity. This is its main difference from classical right-wing extremism. However, there are also assertions about the right to cultural and political autonomy. The reason for the new theoretical justification of nationalism is that today the threat to existing national identities comes not from outside, but from within societies, primarily in connection with migration processes and, accordingly, changes in the ethnic composition of the population.

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Conflict of interests

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Ethical standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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