

## Latin American populism from an international comparative perspective\*

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**Abstract:** Populism is a political phenomenon worthy of attention. Populism has spread in Western societies in recent decades. We should think about this common problem faced by Western societies from the perspective of the entire Western society, and then pay further attention to some aspects of Latin American populism. It is incomplete to study populism only as a unique "political characteristic" of Latin America. Populism is endogenous to representative democracy and originates from the crisis of representation in political establishments. Populism thrives in Latin America because of this. This is the result of the superposition of multiple factors such as low inclusiveness of the regional political system, high degree of social differentiation, unstable economic development, and fragile democratic systems. In addition, Latin American people are willing to follow "Charisma"-style political leaders and lack trust in public institutions. This political culture also provides a social foundation for the "monist" political practice of populism. Since the above factors cannot be eliminated in a short time, populism will remain the "shadow" of Latin American democratic politics. For all countries that adopt representative democracy, as far as Western countries are concerned, as long as the capacity of the political establishment does not meet the needs of public participation, there is the possibility of populism breaking out. Populism is not a feasible solution to the political dilemma of modern democracy. A representative democracy constructed under liberal principles must only by facing our own problems and striving to build a political mechanism that can accommodate and integrate different interest demands can we effectively eliminate the adverse effects of populism. **Keywords:** populism, Latin American democratic system, political establishment, unitary politics. **About the author:** Zhou Nan, Ph.D. in political science, Renmin University of China Lecturer at the School of Foreign Languages

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In the past thirty or forty years, the rise of populism has had a profound impact on political democracy, economic progress, and social integration in Western countries. Judging from the practical results, the performance of populism is unsatisfactory, and most people regard it as a negative politics. Phenomenon. Almost all politicians refuse to admit that they are populists, and prefer to label their opponents as "populists." Unlike European and American countries, populism in Latin America has a longer history, and its recurring appearance is closely related to the national conditions and people's conditions in the region are closely linked: populism is a strong protest by the civilian class against the long-term lack of fairness and justice in the political establishment. At the same time, some political elites lead the people to explore a new development model that is different from the traditional one. In view of the above situation, although populism Socialist practice has failed to provide Latin American countries with beneficial development plans. The academic community still has more sympathy for Latin American populism. For example, some scholars believe that due to imperfect political systems, marginalized groups and lower-class workers in Latin American countries cannot enjoy their dues. political rights, and populism integrates them into the political process, promoting the transformation from oligarchy to mass democracy. Many scholars in domestic Latin American circles translate Latin American "populism" into a neutral "populism". Some opinions It is believed that Latin American populism "relatively solves the contradiction between economic growth and income distribution" and is conducive to political and social stability.

This article believes that the populist trends in Latin America and Europe and the United States have the same essence and similar internal laws, and the practice of populism in Latin America is combined with the region's historical development, social structure, cultural traditions and other factors to form a distinct Regional characteristics, such as the cyclical nature of outbreaks and serious personalization tendencies. Only by taking into account the nature of populism in a general sense and the impact of the special Latin American context on populist practice can we form a clear understanding of Latin American populism.

## 1. Populism as a "problem" in Western society

The most intuitive impression of populism is that of anger and anxiety, using extreme emotions to express and vent dissatisfaction with reality. Although the specific situations and political opinions of each populist trend of thought are different, populist politics follows similar principles. The internal logic of populism, and its ability to break out in many regions and countries in a relatively short period of time, and evolve into a political trend, also shows that the anger and extremes of populism have a relatively broad social base, and there are also countries and societies where populist waves have broken out. Common issues

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Zeng Zhaoyao: "An Outline of Development Issues in Latin America", Beijing: Contemporary World Press, 2011, pp. 208-212.





(3) Populism views political issues from a moral perspective.

Western society has long regarded "multiculturalism" as "political correctness". This tradition is particularly deep in the United Kingdom, the United States, France and other countries. The "monist" political proposition of populism can in the above-mentioned countries, it quickly won social support and posed a threat to mainstream ideas. This was largely due to the fact that it found a rather confusing logical support: a moral declaration of the power to represent the people. Populism combined political differences, poverty and wealth differences and ethnic conflicts are all examined under the category of morality, and these issues are characterized by simplistic labels of "justice" or "evil" in an attempt to guide a "group of morally pure, completely unified but purely fictitious people in the political field." "The people need a moral power." He called his supporters "the people." Patriots", calling political opponents "corrupt" and their followers "traitors". At a general strike rally in 2002, Chavez said this: "This is not for or against Chavez. The problem is the confrontation between patriots and enemies of the motherland." If populists lose an election, they often condemn their opponents or question the electoral system from a moral standpoint. When Trump loses an election, he often accuses his opponents of fraud and declares the election manipulated. After Obrador lost the Mexican presidential election in 2006, he declared that "the victory of the right (political opponents) is against morality." Populism looks at political events from a moral perspective and gives an understanding of the nature of the problem. Subjective judgment, while ignoring the verification of the authenticity of details, is essentially a "moral imagination of politics." Often this general subjective moral perspective only has symbolic meaning and is not based on factual experience, so it is difficult to be falsified.

Since criticism from civil society will weaken populism's monopoly on morality, populist leaders mostly adopt a harsh attitude towards objections and regard them as a betrayal of "the people". Hungarian populist Orban Viktor Kedou promulgated the Hungarian Constitution "Basic Law" in 2012. He explained this: "The people provided good suggestions and instructions to the Hungarian Parliament, so the Parliament approved the "Basic Law". If someone criticizes the Hungarian Constitution, this is not against the government, but it is aimed at the Hungarian people." In Orban's view, those political opponents who do not belong to the "people" did not participate in the drafting and adoption of the constitution, and this constitution will not provide them with any guarantees. Coincidentally, Poland and Bolivia

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[Germany] Written by Jan-Werner Müller, translated by Qian Jingyuan: «What is Populism», Nanjing: Yilin Publishing House, 2020, p.

Page 25. José Pedro Zúñiga "The Missionary Policies of Hugo Chavez" in Latin American Politics and Society Vol 5 07 2008 p 105

[Germany] Written by Jan-Werner Müller, translated by Qian Jingyuan: "What is Populism", Nanjing: Yilin Publishing House, 2020 year, page 41, page 51

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Populist governments in other countries have added exclusive and negative clauses to the promulgated constitutions to limit the power of non-populists, claiming that only the will and interests of the "people" will be reflected in national decision-making. In fact, modern The development of democratic politics is attributed to those struggles for greater inclusiveness. "The people" has always been a controversial and open concept, and the "people" in the populists' mouth are limited to their own supporters. The populist constitution has become a A tool of political factions, it cannot be regarded as the country's democratic political framework. Miller calls this governance method of populist governments "discriminatory legalism".

(4) The logic of populism is to use "monist" politics to realize the political ideal of "people's sovereignty". In the democratic era, politics should be the expression of the general will of the people. Almost all political leaders are proud to represent "the people". Populism The same is true for leaders. However, driven by the "monist" political logic, populism itself has developed into an undemocratic political phenomenon in the democratic era.

First, populism constructs an overall concept of "people" and monopolizes the "right of representation of the people." Populism simplifies and homogenizes the connotation of "people" and gives "people" a single personality. Then, populist leadership People thus monopolize the representation of "the people". Liu Yu believes that opposition to pluralism is the basic feature of populism. Unitary democracy will inevitably move towards "populism", and "once populism occupies the mainstream of society, the trend of pluralism will be affected." Containment and shock." Former Argentine President Juan Peron said, "The political leader is the one who implements the people's wishes." Nigel Farage declared that the result of the British referendum to leave the European Union was "a real victory for the people." In fact, 48% of voters in this election chose to remain in the EU. According to Farage, these people who voted to remain in the EU do not belong to the British "people". Because "the entire people cannot be identified or represented" Therefore, the "people" spoken by populists is closer to a "super-political illusion." Tan Daoming vividly described the "people" constructed by populism as "a rabble dancing to the same rhythm under the command of the leader." Presented to the outside world as a 'collective will' that plays the same tune and speaks with the same voice"

Second, populism uses "zero-sum" thinking to view the diverse interests in politics and society. Left-wing populists oppose the innocent, hard-working working class to a group of corrupt and selfish upper-class elites who get something for nothing, while right-wing populists It also pits the middle- and upper-class groups who are noble and decent and have made great contributions to the country and society against the people at the bottom who occupy public resources and hinder social security like parasites.

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[Germany] Jan-Werner Müller, translated by Qian Jingyuan: «What is Populism», Nanjing: Yilin Publishing House, 2020. Page 58, Liu Yu:

«Populism and Democracy—On American Politics Populism in China», published in "Exploration and Debate", Issue 10, 2016, Page 69, [Germany] Written by Jan-Werner Müller, translated by Qian Jingyuan: «What is Populism», Nanjing: Translated Lin Publishing House, 2020, page 40, page 82

Tan Daoming: "Three Dimensions of Populism: Taking Trump's Populism as an Example", published in "Latin American Studies", Issue 2017 Issue 4, Page 45

Come, Trump targets people of color and new immigrants. There are numerous examples of nonsense, such as "81% of white victims died at the hands of black people", "Mexican immigrants are rapists", etc. Marina from France Populist leaders such as Marine Le Pen, Geert Wilders of the Netherlands, Beate Szydwo of Poland, and Viktor Orban of Hungary all blame their countries' social conflicts on people of color, immigrants, or people of color. Heretic. Richard Hofstadter summarized the logic of populism as: first imagining "a huge and sinister conspiracy, a huge but subtle system, which is trying to weaken and destroy the existing social way of life". In a crisis In the process, populist propositions appear to be very necessary. In order to get out of trouble, the people must "abandon the usual means of political compromise and concession, and adopt all possible means of crusade to defeat the enemy." Therefore, in practice, populism has a negative impact on aggravating social problems. The role of division is inevitable.

## 2. Regional Characteristics of Latin American Populism

Populism appears repeatedly in Latin America and is a unique phenomenon in Latin American politics. Compared with populist trends that have emerged in other countries or regions, there is no essential difference in the causes and internal logic of populism in Latin America. Populism is particularly special in this region. Prosperity has distinct regional characteristics, which is closely related to the historical process, political system, economic model, social structure, cultural tradition and other factors of Latin American countries. (1) The four populist waves in Latin America have cyclical characteristics Latin America It has experienced four populist waves so far. The first populist wave emerged from the 1930s to the 1960s. It opposed the export-oriented economic model and the oligarchic elite rule based on it, and advocated the implementation of strategies to promote the development of national industry. Representative figures include Mexico's Lazaro Cardenas, Brazil's Getulio Vargas, Argentina's Juan Peron, etc. The second wave of populism emerged in the 1980s, opposing the import substitution industrialization model and using it as a It is based on oligarchic elite rule and supports neoliberal development plans. Representatives include Argentina's Carlos Menem, Peru's Alberto Fujimori, Brazil's Collor de Melo, etc. The third wave of populism appeared at the turn of the century. They oppose neoliberal development programs and the associated oligarchic elite rule, and promote left-wing value orientations. Representatives include Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, Rafael Correa of Ecuador, and Evo Morales of Bolivia. After left-wing reforms were in trouble, right-wing populism that opposed social integration flourished in some Latin American countries around 2010, forming the fourth wave of populism. Representatives include Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro and Guatemala's Jimmie. Morales, Keiko Fujimori of Peru, etc.

Although the reasons and specific propositions for the emergence of each populist wave in Latin America are different, they follow a similar development cycle: the original development model is unsustainable, disadvantaged groups in society are squeezed out of the establishment, and populist leaders take the opportunity to recruit a large number of Believers, move towards the political front. After a brief period of prosperity, populist political practice hastily come to an end due to triggering new crises. In the repeated political cycles, populism has accompanied the development process of Latin America and has become a key factor in Latin American politics. Tradition

(2) The serious lack of institutional

representation is a chronic disease of Latin American politics. Wiarda

believes that in the history of Latin America, tradition and semi-feudalism are deeply rooted, the influence of right-wing conservatism has always been strong, and low political inclusiveness has caused the left Movements and guerrilla politics often appear as right-wing challengers. During the colonial period, the European metropolitan countries plundered wealth in Latin America. The colonists only cared about their own economic interests and brutally exploited local people for agricultural and mineral labor. The colonial government was corrupt and inefficient, and implemented a highly centralized political system. In 1595, some positions in the colonial government of Mexico City were auctioned off to the highest bidder. As time went by, this practice became more and more common. In La Plata, Puebla, Buenos Aires, Official positions were sold in jurisdictions such as Enos Aires. By the end of the 18th century, the colonial government had been discredited throughout South America. In this process, the ruling model of the oligarchic elite was established in Latin America: 10% of the population a very low-level elite monopolizes national economic resources and has strong political influence, but lacks a sense of responsibility for national development. The vast majority of the people are marginalized in the national political and economic system. They have neither the right to participate in politics nor the opportunity to share. Economic results and social security. After Latin American countries gained independence, the new political elites in power chose to continue the political and social order of the colonial period to maintain the privileges of this class. "Although most constitutions have included the protection of citizen freedom and equality." However, in political practice, "the ruling class strives to safeguard the interests of transnational capital and industry oligarchs. Not only Indians, blacks, farmers, and miners are excluded, but also workers, intellectuals, and urban middle-income groups find it difficult to achieve political participation." In 1928 In 2006, Colombian farmers in the Caribbean protested against the exploitation of the United Fruit Company and held a general strike. The Colombian government even used its own army to help the United Fruit Company suppress the strike. It is estimated that two to three thousand people were killed. Called the "Banana Massacre"

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[US] Written by Howard J. Wiarda, translated by Guo Cunhai, Deng Yuping, and Ye Jianhui: «The Spirit of Latin America: Culture and Politics Tradition » Hangzhou: Zhejiang University Press, 2019, Page 13

[Intelligence] Written by Sebastian Edwards, translated by Guo Jinxing: «Latin America Left Behind: The Fatal Temptation of Populism», Beijing: CITIC Publishing

Group, 2019, page 31, Osvaldo Barreneche e et al (coords) Historia de América Latina Recordos Tempáticos e Histori ográficos: yyyyy yyy y yyy yyy yyy yyy: yyyyyyyy yy y y yyyyyyyyyy yy yy yyyyyy yyyyy y yy





The Movement Party of the Fifth Republic led by Sri Lanka took this as an opportunity to enter the core of state power. The relationship between economic crisis, institutional authority and populism is as the American sociologist Kang Hauser said, "The core problem of the rise of populism is the institutional crisis, and the economic crisis is An important factor that weakens the value and authority of the existing establishment."

(3) The high degree of differentiation in Latin American society increases the difficulty of expanding

the political system. Most societies in Latin American countries have been highly differentiated for a long time. The gap between rich and poor, imbalanced development, racial discrimination, etc. have always been problems that need to be solved. It can be said that the modern economic history of Latin America is one The country has a history of slow growth, crisis, inequality and poverty. During the colonial period, land resources in Latin America were concentrated in the hands of a few people. In the mid-19th century, 60% of North American farmers owned their own land, compared with only 5% in Latin America. Since then, industrialization and development in Latin America have In the process of modernization, a large number of marginalized groups lack necessary labor skills and can only work in the informal sector. Their economic situation is very difficult and their political influence is very limited. The anthropologist Oscar Lewis recorded it in detail in the book "Children of Sanchez" The poverty and despair experienced by the Sanchez family in Mexico, the social violence suffered by the poor, and the government's inability to provide minimum public services. During the economic upturn, people's living conditions generally improve, and problems caused by uneven development are easier to deal with. During the economic downturn, public resources are increasingly strained, employment opportunities are reduced, and groups that were originally disadvantaged have suffered a greater impact. After the devaluation of the Argentine peso from 2001 to 2002, the poverty rate among Argentine households soared to 40%. The crisis of 1994-1995 , It's hard to find food on the streets of Buenos Aires increased the number of poor people in Mexico by 11%. At this time, antagonism between different social groups was on the rise. Oligarchies and serious social inequality became the target of public criticism, and the possibility of populist outbreaks also increased accordingly.

In highly differentiated Latin American societies, how to narrow differences and integrate interests has become an insurmountable obstacle to the expansion of political institutions. The rise of right-wing populism in Latin America in the past 20 years is a result of the once dominant middle-income class's struggle in identity, social security, and public affairs. Resources and other fields were fully threatened and opposed social integration, demanding a reversal of the trend of diversification. At the beginning of the 21st century, the left-wing Brazilian Labor Party government vigorously promoted the development program of social integration and improved the economic conditions of low-income groups through increased public expenditure and other means. As a result, Brazil's poverty rate has dropped significantly. However, the left-wing development plan has ignored the interests of the middle- and high-income classes. During the 2001-2015 period when the Labor Party was in power, Brazil's per capita income increased by 56%.

J B Alcock "Populism: A Brief Biography" *Sociology* Vol 5 No 3 197 p 375 [Intelligence] Written by Sebastian Edwards, translated by Guo Jinxing: «Latin America Left Behind: The Fatal Temptation of Populism» Beijing : CITIC Publishing Group, 2019, page 38, [US] Sebastian Edwards:

"Research on New and Old Populism in Latin America", published in "Foreign Theoretical Trends", Issue 6, 2012, page 96, Brazil The "upper-middle-

income class" refers to the total population of Brazil excluding the 50% with the lowest annual income and the highest annual income. The rest of the 1% of the population.





The experience of failure has made Latin American people generally have a tangled mentality towards "democracy". They are eager to obtain equality and respect in politics, but they do not believe that they can get rid of their own difficulties by relying on independence and autonomy. This social psychology is reflected in political practice, a very contradictory scenario will appear: whenever there is an economic crisis or political turmoil, the original political establishment will quickly decline due to the lack of a solid social foundation, and the Latin American tradition of advocating political authority will be revived, and the people will habitually seek charismatic leaders in the establishment. In order to reshape authority externally, they strongly demand to fulfill the political ideal of "people's sovereignty" in the atmosphere of fanatical personality worship. The repeated emergence of populism is actually a process of the continuous emergence of political strongmen. Individual citizens' pursuit of democracy is unknowingly interpreted as the pursuit of populism by the general public.

(5) The fragility of the democratic system has led to the frequent emergence of populist "one-dollar" political solutions.

Ren Jiantao pointed out, "If you want to determine the harm of populist politics, you only need to judge whether it has reached the point of challenging the constitutional democratic government. As long as the constitution is the foundation of the democratic government has not been shaken, populism is just playing the role of correcting elitist politics. If populism exceeds the goal of political mobilization and plays the role of subverting the constitutional democratic government, then it must be resolutely stopped." In Latin American countries, populism not only poses a threat to representative democracy, but also changes or subverts modern political systems based on rationality through amending the constitution and other means. Since the 1990s, the Chavez government in Venezuela has initiated a series of political reforms. In 1999, Venezuela established an Emergency Judicial Council and an Emergency Legislative Council. In December of the same year, it promulgated the "Bolivarian Constitution" and changed the bicameral system to a unicameral system. The legislative and judicial powers were seriously weakened. In 2001, the Chavez government urged the National People's Congress of Venezuela to adopt the "Delegated legislative power" recognizes that the president has the power to issue a 12-month emergency bill on a specific issue without parliamentary approval. In 2009, the Chavez government held a referendum to allow the president and other public officials to vote nationwide. Can be continuously elected for voting without restrictions. These reform measures have made fundamental changes to the top-level design of Venezuela's political system, breaking the separation of powers and checks and balances, and maximizing the expansion of executive power. What happened in Venezuela is not an isolated case in Latin America. Gass, Peron, Menem, Fujimori and others all sought to establish unchecked administrative power through self-coup, amending the constitution and other means, and then relied on the development of clientelist networks to consolidate their support base. The classic situation of Latin American populism is that leaders pass "Numerical strength" wins the election, and then the separation of powers and institutions will be emp

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