



# Library Note

## Populism and Nationalism: Implications for the International Order

This House of Lords Library briefing has been prepared in advance of a debate that is scheduled to take place in the House on 19 January 2017 on the following motion:

Lord Bruce of Bennachie to move that this House takes note of challenges to the liberal international order posed by the development of populism and nationalism around the world.

In recent years, and in particular in 2016, events have taken place in a number of countries, including the US, the UK and Austria amongst others, which scholars and commentators have identified as exhibiting a populist and/or nationalist character and being part of a trend of disruption to the current 'rules-based international order'. However, there is disagreement over what is meant by the terms 'populism' and 'nationalism' and whether elections and referenda, or changes in political discourse subject to these characteristics, pose a systemic risk to the international liberal order. This latter term is widely understood to mean the framework of liberal political and economic rules, embodied in a network of international organisations and regulations, established following the Second World War; but whether such an order exists is itself the subject of disagreement. The UK Government recognises and supports the concept of a rules-based international order.

This briefing outlines the UK Government's position on the current international order which provides the backdrop to contemporary international relations, before summarising the debate over the terms 'populism' and 'nationalism'. It then surveys the work of scholars and commentators who see the rise in populism and nationalism in the domestic politics of a number of countries around the world as phenomena which exhibit either positive or negative characteristics, or a combination of the two, which in turn have been seen as influencing, or having the capacity to influence, international relations. The briefing should be read as an introduction to, and not a comprehensive survey of, the significant body of literature on the subject.

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## I. Introduction

Observers and commentators have noted a rise in populism and nationalism in the politics of a number of countries in recent years, particularly in certain countries in Europe and in the US in 2016, which some contend poses a challenge to the existing ‘liberal international order’.<sup>1</sup> The latter term, which has been the subject of debate among academics, has been defined by Professor G John Ikenberry as “order that is open and loosely rule-based”, which “can be contrasted with closed and non-rule-based relations—whether geopolitical blocs, exclusive regional spheres, or closed imperial systems”.<sup>2</sup> It is broadly understood to mean the framework of liberal political and economic rules, embodied in a network of international organisations (such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank), established following the Second World War, though some scholars disagree that such a rules-based international order exists.<sup>3</sup>

### I.1 UK Government Position

The UK Government recognises the concept of a ‘rules-based international order’.<sup>4</sup> In its most recent *National Security Strategy*, published in November 2015, the Government characterised this as being “founded on relationships between states and through international institutions, with shared rules and agreements on behaviour”.<sup>5</sup> The text continued:

It has enabled economic integration and security cooperation to expand, to the benefit of people around the world. It has done much to encourage predictable behaviour by states and the non-violent management of disputes, and has led states to develop political and economic arrangements at home which favour open markets, the rule of law, participation and accountability. The UK has consistently championed this framework.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of this, it noted that the world was changing “rapidly and fundamentally”, and identified the “erosion of the rules-based international order”, which would make it “harder to build consensus and tackle global threats”, and the “resurgence of state-based threats, and

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Francis Fukuyama has written: “We appear to be entering a new age of populist nationalism, in which the dominant liberal order that has been constructed since the 1950s has come under attack from angry and energised democratic majorities”. He has also asserted that a “new populist-nationalist internationale has appeared” (Francis Fukuyama, ‘US Against the World? Trump’s America and the New Global Order’, *Financial Times*, 11 November 2016). See also: BBC News, ‘[Guide to Nationalist Parties Challenging Europe](#)’, 23 May 2016; and ‘[Will Trump-style Revolt Engulf Europe?](#)’, 11 November 2016.

<sup>2</sup> G John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis and Transformation of the American World Order*, 2011, p 18. In 1999, Ikenberry, now a Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton University, posited (together with Daniel Deudney, now an Associate Professor at Johns Hopkins University) that a liberal international order was a “complex composite” of five “distinctive and important components”, namely “security co-binding, penetrated hegemony, semi-sovereignty and partial great powers, economic openness and civic identity and community” (Daniel Deudney and G John Ikenberry, ‘[The Nature and Sources of Liberal International Order](#)’, *Review of International Studies*, 1 April 1999, vol 25 no 2, pp 179–96).

<sup>3</sup> Chatham House, ‘[London Conference 2015: Challenges to the Rules-Based International Order](#)’, accessed 9 January 2017; and Patrick Porter, ‘[Sorry, Folks. There Is No Rules-Based World Order](#)’, *The National Interest*, 28 August 2016. Patrick Porter is a Professor of Strategic Studies at the University of Exeter.

<sup>4</sup> HM Government, *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom*, November 2015, Cm 9161, p 10.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, p 20.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*.

intensifying wider state competition”, as two of four particular challenges that were “likely to drive UK security priorities in the coming decade”.<sup>7</sup>

In a section specifically addressing the rules-based international order, the strategy attributed the changing international context to “developments such as the growing role of non-state actors, the impact of technology and longer-term shifts of economic wealth to the south and east of the world”.<sup>8</sup> It argued that such changes created “new challenges and opportunities”, but that the rules-based international order had “always relied for its effectiveness and legitimacy on the active participation and contribution of all states, in particular major states, and on the ability of institutions and relationships to adapt to reflect new opportunities and challenges”. The document also added that the rules-based international order relied on the “enforcement of standards and laws covering a wide range of activities and behaviours, from the Geneva Conventions to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea”, though some powerful states and non-state actors were “increasingly ignoring international norms that they believe run contrary to their interests, or favour the West”. The Russian Federation’s annexation of Crimea, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s use of chemical weapons and some non-state actors’ lack of compliance with international humanitarian law were given as examples of such behaviour.

In her foreword to the first annual report on the *National Security Strategy*, published in December 2016, the Prime Minister, Theresa May, stated that the UK faced “renewed challenges to the rules-based international order that provides the bedrock of our security”.<sup>9</sup> In this follow-up report, the Government stated that some of the challenges to the international order it had identified remained a “serious threat”, and cited North Korea’s continued nuclear tests as an additional example to those outlined in the *National Security Strategy*. It added:

More generally, we have seen growing concerns about globalisation; and pushback from other countries at the United Nations (UN) against the International Criminal Court, and against concepts such as the Responsibility to Protect, human rights norms, the rights of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.<sup>10</sup>

The Government stated that it had “tackled” challenges to the rules-based international order “head-on” in the year to December 2016.<sup>11</sup> As evidence, it provided examples such as the UK’s role in securing agreement for the European Union (EU) to maintain sanctions against the Russian Federation for its “illegal annexation of Crimea”; securing sanctions against North Korea for “conducting further nuclear tests in flagrant violation of UN Security Council resolutions”; and joining with EU and G7 partners in “expressing deep concern” and “urging respect for international law” following Chinese actions in the South China Sea.

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<sup>7</sup> HM Government, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom](#), November 2015, Cm 9161, p 15. The two other particular challenges were listed as the “increasing threat posed by terrorism, extremism and instability”; and the “impact of technology, especially cyber threats, and wider technological developments”.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, p 20.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, p 3.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, p 6. For further information on the Responsibility to Protect, see: House of Lords Library, [The ‘Responsibility to Protect’ and the Application of this International Norm by the UK and the UN](#), 10 July 2015.

<sup>11</sup> HM Government, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: First Annual Report 2016](#), 7 December 2016, p 23.

## 2. Definitions

### 2.1 Populism

The term ‘populism’ is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as follows:

The policies or principles of any of various political parties which seek to represent the interests of ordinary people [...] Also: support for or representation of ordinary people or their views; speech, action, writing, etc, intended to have general appeal.<sup>12</sup>

However, the historian Michael Kazin has noted that the term has “long been a contested and ambiguous concept” in academic debate.<sup>13</sup> This view was supported by the political scientist Cas Mudde when he stated that the term was “one of the most contested concepts in the social sciences” and that there was therefore “no scholarly agreement on how to conceptualise it”.<sup>14</sup> Dr Mudde has also commented on the confusion surrounding use of the term:

Both academics and pundits often employ the term populism to denote all the political actors and behaviours they dislike. While there are good reasons to worry about authoritarianism, economic mismanagement, opportunism, and racism, we should not treat them all as equivalents of populism.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the ambiguity surrounding the concept, Dr Mudde has offered his own definition of populism which appears to have become increasingly influential over the course of the past decade.<sup>16</sup> The *Economist* has summarised this definition as follows:

In his view populism is a “thin ideology”, one that merely sets up a framework: that of a pure people versus a corrupt elite. (He contrasts it with pluralism, which accepts the legitimacy of many different groups). This thin ideology can be attached to all sorts of “thick” ideologies with more moving parts, such as socialism, nationalism, anti-imperialism or racism, in order to explain the world and justify specific agendas.<sup>17</sup>

Other academics have argued that this ‘thin ideology’ definition is not entirely adequate to explain populism. Jan-Werner Müller, for example, has argued that not everyone who criticises elites are populists.<sup>18</sup> He has instead argued that populists “claim that they and they alone speak

<sup>12</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘[Populism](#)’, accessed 9 January 2017. *Chambers Dictionary* defines a populist as “someone who believes in the right and ability of the common people to play a major part in governing themselves; a supporter, wooer or student of the common people” (*Chambers Dictionary*, 2014, p 1206).

<sup>13</sup> Michael Kazin, ‘[Trump and American Populism](#)’, *Foreign Affairs*, 6 October 2016. Michael Kazin is a Professor of History at Georgetown University.

<sup>14</sup> Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, ‘[Populism](#)’, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, August 2013. Cas Mudde is an Associate Professor at the University of Georgia. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, formerly of the University of Sussex, is an Associate Professor at the Diego Portales University (Chile).

<sup>15</sup> Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, ‘[Understanding the Populist Backlash](#)’, Oxford University Press Blog, 29 December 2016. In addition, Dr Mudde has argued that “scholars working on different world regions tend to equate, and sometimes conflate, populism with quite distinct phenomena”, such as anti-immigration sentiment and xenophobia in Europe and clientelism and economic mismanagement in Latin America (Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, ‘[Populism](#)’, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, August 2013). The authors further note that the term has previously been employed to describe agrarian populist movements in Russia and the US at the turn of the 19th century.

<sup>16</sup> *Economist*, ‘[What is Populism?](#)’, 19 December 2016.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Jan-Werner Müller, ‘[Capitalism in One Family](#)’, *London Review of Books*, 1 December 2016, vol 38 no 23. Jan-Werner Müller is a Professor of Politics at Princeton University.

in the name of what they tend to call the ‘real people’ or the ‘silent majority’, and that they “define an alternative political reality in which their monopoly on the representation of the ‘real people’ is all that matters”. The theme of conflict is present in other definitions. Michael Kazin, cited above, has defined populism as a “language whose speakers conceive of ordinary people as a noble assemblage not bounded narrowly by class, view their elite opponents as self-serving and undemocratic, and seek to mobilise the former against the latter”.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, it has been argued that there are distinctions within the ‘populist’ category, such as that between ‘inclusive’ and ‘exclusive’ varieties of populism. As the *Economist* has explained:

Exclusive [and identitarian] populism focuses on shutting out stigmatised groups (refugees, Roma), and is more common in Europe. Inclusive [and pluralist] populism demands that politics be opened up to stigmatised groups (the poor, minorities), and is more common in Latin America.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, it has been noted that there can be other differences between right-wing and left-wing populism, with left-wing populists championing ‘the people’ against an elite or an establishment and right-wing populists championing ‘the people’ against an elite accused of favouring a third group.<sup>21</sup> In this view, the main difference between right-wing and left-wing populism is “not whether they exclude, but whom they exclude”.<sup>22</sup>

There are also those who disagree that the concept can be adequately defined. The journalist John Judis, for example, has contended that it is a “mistake” to try to define the term, as the “different people and parties that are placed in this category [populism] enjoy family resemblances of one to the other, but there is not a universal set of traits that is common to all of them”.<sup>23</sup> Rather, he has argued that populism is “not an ideology, but a political logic—a way of thinking about politics”.<sup>24</sup>

## 2.2 Nationalism

The term ‘nationalism’ is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as follows:

Advocacy of or support for the interests of one’s own nation, esp. to the exclusion or detriment of the interests of other nations. Also: advocacy of or support for national independence or self-determination.<sup>25</sup>

The academic Benedict Anderson alluded to the ambiguities surrounding the term when he stated that, together with ‘nation’ and ‘nationality’, it had been “notoriously difficult to define”.<sup>26</sup> Since he offered his definition of the concept to mean an “imagined political community”, it has

<sup>19</sup> Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*, 2014, p 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Economist*, ‘[What is Populism?](#)’, 19 December 2016. See also: Giorgos Katsambekis, ‘[The Populist Surge in Post-Democratic Times: Theoretical and Political Challenges](#)’, *Political Quarterly*, 16 December 2016, p 5.

<sup>21</sup> John Judis, ‘[Us v Them: The Birth of Populism](#)’, *Guardian*, 13 October 2016. John Judis is the author of *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics*, 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Cas Mudde, ‘[The Problem with Populism](#)’, *Guardian*, 17 February 2015.

<sup>23</sup> John Judis, ‘[Us v Them: The Birth of Populism](#)’, *Guardian*, 13 October 2016.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘[Nationalism](#)’, accessed 9 January 2017. *Chambers Dictionary* defines a nationalist as “a person who favours or strives after unity, independence, interests or domination or a nation; a member of a political party specially so called” (*Chambers Dictionary*, 2014, p 1023).

<sup>26</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 2006, p 3. *Imagined Communities* was first published in 1983.

been noted that “all societies draw on nationalism of one sort or another to define relations between the state, the citizen and the outside world”.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, the sociologist Professor Craig Calhoun has stated that nationalist categories of identity are “central” to “practical reasoning about democracy, political legitimacy and the nature of society itself”.<sup>28</sup> He has argued that nationalism is not a “moral mistake”, despite possible negatives, but is instead “one of the background conditions on which modern democracy has been based”.<sup>29</sup> In short, it is his view that nationalism “matters”.<sup>30</sup>

However, it has been argued that events in a number of countries, such as the US, the UK, Poland and Austria, and also political discourse in countries such as China, Russia, Egypt and India, have indicated a shift from “universal, civic nationalism” towards a “blood-and-soil, ethnic sort”.<sup>31</sup> It is argued that it is this “exclusive, often ethnically based, form of nationalism”, which can also be seen as a “nostalgic nationalism”, which presents a challenge to the liberal international order.<sup>32</sup>

Dr Benjamin de Cleen has outlined how, in his view, nationalism and populism are distinct.<sup>33</sup> In answer to a question relating to the importance of distinguishing between the concepts, he stated:

This distinction is important for a number of reasons. First of all, if you look at populisms they are not all nationalist, and if you look at nationalists they are not all populists. But, secondly, even if all populisms would be nationalist and all nationalisms populist, we would still be able to better understand these populist nationalisms and nationalist populisms if we start from a clear conceptual distinction between populism and nationalism [...]

I think it helps to stress populism’s vertical dimension: populist politics construct ‘the people’ by opposing it to ‘the elite’ and claim to represent ‘the people’. Nationalism is not built around this vertical dimension, but around a horizontal dimension: nationalist politics construct and claim to represent the nation, which is discursively constructed by distinguishing between those who are ‘in’ and those who are ‘out’ of the nation.

This distinction between populism and nationalism helps to understand how populism and nationalism are articulated in different kinds of politics. The question [then] becomes how these down/up and in/out constructions of ‘the people’ and ‘the nation’ are related.<sup>34</sup>

The *Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* states that it is “not surprising that populism is often linked to nationalism in the literature”.<sup>35</sup> The authors of the book assert that “even if populism

<sup>27</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 2006, p 6; and *Economist*, ‘[League of Nationalists](#)’, 19 November 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Craig Calhoun, *Nations Matter: Culture, History and the Cosmopolitan Dream*, 2007, p 8. Professor Calhoun was until recently the Director of the London School of Economics and Political Science.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*, p 1.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*, p 171.

<sup>31</sup> *Economist*, ‘[League of Nationalists](#)’, 19 November 2016.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*; and Gideon Rachman, ‘Trump, Putin, Xi and the Rise of Nostalgic Nationalism’, *Financial Times*, 2 January 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Dr de Cleen is an Associate Professor at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

<sup>34</sup> Benjamin De Cleen and Antonis Galanopoulos, ‘[Populism, Nationalism and Transnationalism](#)’, OpenDemocracy, 25 October 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Freeden et al, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, 2013. Page numbers unmarked in online version.



were always to be combined with nationalism in practice, which we incidentally do not believe to be the case, that is not the same as saying that nationalism is a definitional feature of populism”. Instead, the authors contend that the “most convincing interconnection between nationalism and populism can be found in the European populist radical right parties, which share a core ideology of authoritarianism, nativism and populism”. However, they also contend that “nativism and populism are two distinct features that do not fully overlap”.

### 3. Implications for the International Order

Commentators have written a great deal both on the perceived positives and negatives of the rise in populism and nationalism, both on domestic politics which influence a state’s relations with other states and on the liberal international order generally. This section summarises some of those arguments. It should be seen as an introduction to, and not a comprehensive survey of, the significant body of literature on the subject.

#### Liberal International Order

Though there appears to be consensus that the international order is in a moment of crisis, there is less agreement over whether it is at risk of unravelling. On the one hand, some view the international order as being under significant challenge. On the other, some see the currently perceived crisis as an issue of authority, rather than as a sign of the imminent failure of the system, which the liberal international order will survive.

Writers such as Dr Ulrich Speck contend that the liberal international order is under “existential threat”.<sup>36</sup> For Dr Speck, the crisis is taking place on two levels. He believes that pressure is coming from inside liberal democracies, “where populist politicians are pushing back against open borders and open societies”, and also from outside, “where autocratic regimes are doing their best to reset the rules of the game in their favour”. Dr Speck argues that a new illiberal order is a possibility, driven by ‘revisionist’ powers such as China and Russia. He has stated that although Beijing and Moscow “hold different conceptions of international order”, the leadership in both countries wants “more influence abroad, doesn’t like the international system in its current guise and is ready to invest substantial resources in suborning it”.<sup>37</sup> On this theme, he writes:

[...] both China and Russia would like to see the authoritarian system they have built at home mirrored in international relations: an internationalised ‘power vertical’, to borrow a Putinist concept, in which strong countries command and the weak obey. Small countries such as Vietnam or the Philippines have to accept that China demands primacy in the South China Sea; Russia’s neighbours such as Ukraine have to accept orders from Moscow. The idea of international order they have in mind is multipolar, not multilateral: instead of a system built on the idea of equality of states, they want a hierarchical order dominated by a few major states. The liberal order, based on the consensus between largely sovereign, equal states, is standing in the way of their designs.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Ulrich Speck, ‘[The Crisis of Liberal Order](#)’, *The American Interest*, 12 September 2016. Dr Ulrich Speck is currently a Senior Fellow at the Transatlantic Academy in Washington, DC.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*



He questions whether the liberal international order would survive without its “chief underwriter”, the United States, and observes that US President-elect Donald Trump has stated that “Americanism, not globalism, will be our credo”. A consequence of the rise in the number of populists in office, he contends, would be “much less international cooperation” and “increased distrust between states”, in turn leading to an intensification of conflicts with neighbours.<sup>39</sup> In a similar vein, Gideon Rachman, chief foreign affairs columnist for the *Financial Times*, has written that “nostalgic nationalism”, as employed by President-elect Donald Trump in the US, President Xi Jinping in China, President Vladimir Putin in Russia and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, can become “dangerous when it slides into mythmaking and hostility to outsiders”, because at that point the “chances of a clash between rival nationalist ideologies increases”.<sup>40</sup>

Professor Francis Fukuyama has written that in an era when nationalist politics is “reshaping the West”, the “greatest challenge to liberal democracy comes not so much from overtly authoritarian powers such as China, as from within”.<sup>41</sup> He contends that the “dominant liberal order that has been constructed since the 1950s has come under attack from angry and energised majorities”. Professor Fukuyama also asserts that the “open trade and investment regime”, which characterises the liberal international order, has “depended on the hegemonic power of the US to remain afloat”, but that the policies outlined on the campaign trail by President-elect Donald Trump, such as renegotiating existing trade agreements and conditional support for traditional US allies, represented dangers to both the global economy and for the global security system which are “impossible to overstate”.

However, Professor G John Ikenberry refutes that there is a crisis of liberal internationalism.<sup>42</sup> Instead, he sees the current crisis in the international order as one of “authority” rather than as a result of a failure of the system.<sup>43</sup> He contends that although the “American-led hegemonic order is troubled”, the “deeper system of liberal internationalism at the core of today’s international order still holds sway”.<sup>44</sup> On this point, he has argued:

States continue to have deep—and indeed growing—interests in an international order that is open and at least loosely rule-based, ie a system of multilateral governance. An expanding array of constituencies and stakeholders exist across the global system that support, in one way or another, such a system of multilateral governance. Grand ideological alternatives to such an international order do not exist, nor are they being championed by leading states. What troubles liberal multilateral governance are the difficulties in building new bargains, coalitions, and forms of cooperation that will enable liberal internationalism to transition from a hegemonic to a post-hegemonic era.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ulrich Speck, [‘The Crisis of Liberal Order’](#), *The American Interest*, 12 September 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Gideon Rachman, ‘Trump, Putin, Xi and the Rise of Nostalgic Nationalism’, *Financial Times*, 2 January 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Francis Fukuyama, ‘US Against the World? Trump’s America and the New Global Order’, *Financial Times*, 11 November 2016. Professor Fukuyama is a Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University.

<sup>42</sup> G John Ikenberry, [‘The Future of Liberal World Order’](#), *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, September 2015, vol 15 no 3, p 451. Note that this article was written before certain events in 2016 took place.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid*, p 451.

<sup>44</sup> G John Ikenberry, [‘The Future of Multilateralism: Governing the World in a Post-Hegemonic Era’](#), *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, September 2015, vol 15 no 3, p 400.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid*.

He concluded:

The diffusion of power and diversity of interests that mark today's global system make it hard to envisage the construction of a coherent and well-functioning multilateral system of governance. But there are strengths and opportunities in the existing order that can be built upon [...]

A fragmented and chaotic global system is possible, but it is not an outcome any major state in the system should welcome. After all the pessimism about the weakening and breakdown of the existing system has been voiced, we are still left with a shared interest in a stable system of global governance.<sup>46</sup>

## Domestic Politics

There is also disagreement on whether the recent advance of populism and nationalism in the domestic politics of various countries, which by extension can have an effect on international relations, is positive or negative. Some argue that a rise can influence change aimed at satisfying previously disengaged citizens, whereas some argue that it can polarise societies and lead to internal conflict and the weakening of institutions.

Academic writers such as Dr Benjamin Moffitt have written that populism can be seen to have a number of democratic tendencies:

These include its drive to make politics more accessible and 'popular'; its potential to include previously excluded or disenfranchised identities within its conception of 'the people'; and its ability to reveal the sometimes less-than-democratic tendencies of contemporary forms of democratic politics.<sup>47</sup>

Dr Moffitt notes that populism can be considered democratic in various ways, one of which is that it "renders politics far more comprehensible and understandable for everyday citizens", which contrasts with the "convoluted language of technocrats".<sup>48</sup>

Similarly, Dr Giorgos Katsambekis has written that rather than seeing populism as a "pathological and anti-democratic form of politics", it "might be better to understand it was a way—among many others—to appeal to groups of people, even to national audiences, in order to mobilise them against named opponents, and at the same time a way to offer some kind of incorporation".<sup>49</sup> He elaborated:

This populist incorporation can be exclusive and identitarian ('you're one of us, as long as we share the same ethnic origins'), or it can be inclusive and pluralist ('you're one of

<sup>46</sup> G John Ikenberry, '[The Future of Multilateralism: Governing the World in a Post-Hegemonic Era](#)', *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, September 2015, vol 15 no 3, pp 410–3.

<sup>47</sup> Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style and Representation*, 2016, p 142. It should be added that Moffitt also summarises anti-democratic tendencies (p 145) that can manifest in populist politics. Dr Moffitt is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Department of Political Science at Stockholm University.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid*, p 142.

<sup>49</sup> Giorgos Katsambekis, '[The Populist Surge in Post-Democratic Times: Theoretical and Political Challenges](#)', *Political Quarterly*, 16 December 2016, p 5. Dr Katsambekis is an Associate Researcher at the University of Graz.

us regardless of ethnicity, religion, etc, as long as we stand together against the neoliberal elite').<sup>50</sup>

He also notes that when citizens “feel misrepresented or not represented at all” and where there are “serious doubts about the moral integrity of the political elite and the policies being implemented have little to do with the popular vote”, populist politicians and parties can “claim to better understand and express people’s feelings of marginalisation, frustration or even infuriation with a political system that has become self-serving, unresponsive and alienated from those whom it is supposed to serve”.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, “discontent can be directly expressed from below, through populist social movements that reclaim ‘power for the people’, creating the conditions where ‘populism in the streets’ can meet with ‘populism in the parliament’”.

This point has been echoed by John Judis, who has written that “populist campaigns and parties often function as warning signs of a political crisis”.<sup>52</sup> He added:

Populist movements themselves do not often achieve their own objectives. Their demands may be co-opted by the major parties, or they may be thoroughly rejected. But they do roil the waters. They signal that the prevailing political ideology is not working and the standard worldview is breaking down.<sup>53</sup>

Populist and nationalist politicians and parties can therefore be seen to have influence even when they do not succeed at the ballot box. In short, as in the words of Cas Mudde:

The main good is that populism brings to the fore issues that large parts of the population care about, but that the political elites want to avoid discussing; think about immigration for the populist right or austerity for the populist left.<sup>54</sup>

Dr Simon Toubeau echoes this point, in particular for nationalist politicians and parties in Europe.<sup>55</sup> He has argued that democracy offers the mechanism through which nationalist parties can “contaminate the platforms of other mainstream parties”. He has stated that by exerting competitive pressures during local, national and European elections, such parties can force “bigger parties to shift their political offerings as they attempt to avoid losing voters”.

However, among those who have surveyed perceived negatives, Benjamin Moffitt has written that populism has been seen to have some anti-democratic tendencies which can manifest concurrently with its democratic tendencies.<sup>56</sup> These include “populism’s targeting of others associated with ‘the elite’; its denial of complexity and heterogeneity; and its tendency towards extreme personalisation”.

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<sup>50</sup> Giorgos Katsambekis, [‘The Populist Surge in Post-Democratic Times: Theoretical and Political Challenges’](#), *Political Quarterly*, 16 December 2016, p 5. Katsambekis states that this is a “simplified representation of possible articulations”, and that ‘hybrid’ cases that do not fit left/right, inclusive/exclusive or monist/pluralist divisions.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid*, p 6.

<sup>52</sup> John Judis, [‘Us v Them: The Birth of Populism’](#), *Guardian*, 13 October 2016.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>54</sup> Cas Mudde, [‘The Problem with Populism’](#), *Guardian*, 17 February 2015.

<sup>55</sup> Simon Toubeau, [‘Brexit: Europe’s New Nationalism is Here to Stay’](#), University of Nottingham Ballots and Bullets Blog, 28 June 2016. Dr Toubeau is an Assistant Professor in Politics and International Relations at the University of Nottingham. For further information, see: BBC News, [‘Guide to Nationalist Parties Challenging Europe’](#), 23 May 2016.

<sup>56</sup> Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style and Representation*, 2016, p 145.

Similarly, Cas Mudde has written that the “main bad” about populism is that it is a “monist and moralist ideology, which denies the existence of divisions of interest and opinions with ‘the people’ and rejects the legitimacy of political opponents”.<sup>57</sup> He continued:

As the populists are the vox populi, ie the voice of all the people, anyone with a different view speaks for ‘special interests’, ie the elite. Given that the key distinction is between the pure people and the corrupt elite, any compromise would lead to the corruption of the people and is therefore rejected. This uncompromising stand leads to a polarised political culture, in which non-populists turn into anti-populists.<sup>58</sup>

This point has been echoed by Jan-Werner Müller, who has argued that the claim of populists to a moral monopoly of representation has two consequences that are “deleterious for democracy”.<sup>59</sup> Firstly, he contends that the accusation that other political contenders must be illegitimate makes the subject of politics personal rather than policy. Secondly, in his view, those who do not support the platform will be seen as not constituting the “real people”.

Ulrich Speck has argued that the rise in populism could result in more conflict in societies. Should the “new populists” take power in established democracies, he has stated, it is likely that these states would become “more authoritarian, ruled by anti-establishment demagogues appealing to direct democracy, and often relying on referenda”. He added:

The checks and balances painstakingly developed in mature Western democratic institutions would take a hit, and consequently the rights of minorities would as well. Conflict in the West’s already diverse societies would likely increase, with regular outbreaks of violence and potentially more terrorism in the offing. With the return of borders as major impediment for the flow of people, goods, capital and information, economies in the West would suffer and decline, adding fuel for conflict.<sup>60</sup>

The *Economist* has contended that “populism’s belief that the people are always right is bad news for two elements of liberal democracy: the rights of minorities and the rule of law”.<sup>61</sup>

However, some have argued that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to assess the value, whether positive or negative, of the phenomena. For example, Giorgos Katsambekis has asserted:

[...] it is practically impossible and methodologically wrong to adopt a firm axiological position vis-à-vis populism tout court, as if it were something good or bad, reactionary or progressive, democratic or anti-democratic. Whether we like it or not, it has been and it can be all of that, depending on the actor that that incarnates it and the context in which it manifests.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Cas Mudde, [‘The Problem with Populism’](#), *Guardian*, 17 February 2015.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Jan-Werner Müller, [‘Capitalism in One Family’](#), *London Review of Books*, 1 December 2016, vol 38 no 23.

<sup>60</sup> Ulrich Speck, [‘The Crisis of Liberal Order’](#), *The American Interest*, 12 September 2016.

<sup>61</sup> *Economist*, [‘What is Populism?’](#), 19 December 2016.

<sup>62</sup> Giorgos Katsambekis, [‘The Populist Surge in Post-Democratic Times: Theoretical and Political Challenges’](#), *Political Quarterly*, 16 December 2016.

#### 4. Select Further Reading

- Michael Freeden et al, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, 2013
- Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*, 2014
- Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style and Representation*, 2016
- Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism?*, 2016
- John Judis, *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics*, 2016
- Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism*, 1997
- Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 2006
- Craig Calhoun, *Nations Matter: Culture, History and the Cosmopolitan Dream*, 2007
- Daniel Deudney and G John Ikenberry, '[The Nature and Sources of Liberal International Order](#)', *Review of International Studies*, 1 April 1999, vol 25 no 2, pp 179–96
- [Japanese Journal of Political Science](#), September 2015, vol 15 no 3
- Giorgos Katsambekis, '[The Populist Surge in Post-Democratic Times: Theoretical and Political Challenges](#)', *Political Quarterly*, 16 December 2016

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