

A BINARY THREAT: HOW SOCIAL MEDIA AMPLIFIES THE DANGERS OF POPULISM

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Abstract: *Populism is now internationally recognized as a legitimate threat to the democratic status quo. However, there's still very little research in terms of the way such actors are able to use social media to instantly get their message across to the people. While modern Internet platforms are not the sole privilege of populists, their tendency towards bypassing politics as a whole makes this a very dangerous phenomenon.*

Keywords: *social media populism, threat, neo-populism.*

Introduction

While populism as a whole started to gather status ever since the early 2000s, there is now a category which was not only unexpected, but also surprised many observers with the intensity of its effects: electoral populism, which evolved into year-round social media populism.

At the root of more traditional definitions, populism is seen as the idea that society is separated “into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’”, so there’s a strong need for a leader that will be able to return politics to being “an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people”¹.

Social media populism, on the other hand, does not necessarily refer to actors during an electoral campaign because, through its natural role, populism is born to be a part of the opposition. At a gathering during his campaign for the 2016 elections, Donald Trump brought forward a notion that would, from that moment, become a staple of the new status quo promoted by characters such as Nigel Farage and Viktor Orban: “*The only important thing is the unification of the people, because the other people don’t mean anything*”, the future president said².

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¹ C. Mudde, “The populist zeitgeist”, in *Government and opposition* 39.4 (2004), p. 543.

² I. Tharoor,, ”Trump’s populism is about creating division, not unity”, in *The Washington Post*, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/02/06/trumps-populism-is-about-creating-division-not-unity/>, (accessed on 23.09.2021).