

Laidlaw Research Proposal

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The Cross, the Purse and the Populist.

Are cultural policies a more feasible solution to the rise of populism?

In a small town in rural England, there's a guy who thinks immigrants are a net negative on society, that things aren't just the way they used to be, jokes aren't the same and broadly speaking society has gone mad. The leftists and metropolitan types have pushed multi-culturalism upon the common man, who is now confined to the local pub. Maybe he doesn't exist, maybe he does, that most of us recognise the archetype is likely.

Over the last decade, populist parties have gone from the pub corner to parliament, throughout Europe countries such as Greece, Hungary, and Poland are all lead by populist leaders and the major economies in Europe all have burgeoning populist parties, Vox in Spain, AfD in Germany and The National Front in France. Broadly, populism is defined in the existing literature as an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite'. This type of rhetoric has almost definitely been an influence on political results such as the election of Trump or Brexit with appeals to, for example, the 'common man'.

Why could this be? What consequences does this change present? In my project this summer I aim to think more about these questions and hopefully provide you all with some meaningful answers. Could 'cultural values' have a role to play in these new developments, or maybe it is solely the domain of good old economics? It will be my contention that if we are to contain populism, we ought to give more focus to our populations culture, or values. To do this I will first investigate the current literature around the rise of populism, once I understand the topic at a greater depth, I will then analyse previous methods to contain populism and come to a conclusion on which methods are the most effective and feasible in today's economic and political climate. Thus, I expect that it is cultural policies which target the values of the 'left behind' that will be the most feasible today.

Maybe people like the guy in the opening paragraph don't matter, maybe they don't even exist. It's entirely possible that he's just arrogant, ignorant and bigoted – one might therefore even say not worth arguing for, or perhaps that we understand him already, what more does one need to know than he's a bigot or racist? If an understanding of the anger and thus bigotry could be attained, and therefore contained, maybe these members of our society are worth addressing, even if they are on the wrong side of history.

If you have any questions about my research, send me an email at st1421@york.ac.uk.

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