

## Electoral Systems and Populism: How Have The Electoral Systems Of the US and UK Contributed To The Spread Of Populism?

Populism is an increasingly powerful political force across the globe. Defined as 'an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the pure people versus the corrupt elite' (Mudde, 2004, 543). Building on this idea of societal conflict between groups, my project fits into the university's research theme 'Justice and Equality' specifically the 'Prejudice, Discrimination and Toleration' element.

Whilst populism is growing, it has not embedded itself into societies uniformly, some countries have been more affected by it than others (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2018). This project will explore the link between electoral systems and the spread of populism. Subtle changes to the electoral system can have a big difference in the outcome; the plethora of systems across the world has meant that populism is more rooted in some countries than others, even if said countries are relatively similar culturally and in the electoral system they use. Duverger's law states that majoritarian systems favour a two-party system, in which case if the two main parties converge on the median voter, those at either end of the political spectrum may feel left out, potentially causing polarisation and populism.

My research will be an in-depth literature review of the spread of populism in the USA and UK, specifically looking at the Brexit referendum and Donald Trump's election in 2016. I have chosen to focus on these two countries as they are the examples of successful populist movements that have entered mainstream political discourse. In addition, both events were highly divisive, with the dichotomy inherent to populism present in the rhetoric of both campaigns. Whilst my original research proposal outlined a different research style and included more countries, a literature review focussing on these two ensures that the project will go into enough depth to answer the question sufficiently and still be achievable in the allotted timeframe.

My research will consider a number of factors and isolate the effects that the electoral systems have had on the rise of populism in these countries. It will also examine how they have accentuated other social phenomena such as social cleavages, prejudice and tolerance. The study's conclusion will judge whether these electoral systems have contributed to the variation in populism's strength in these countries. Unfortunately, it will not be possible to extrapolate my findings to a wider set of countries, but a future project could build on this research to do so.

### References

Mudde, C. (2004), The Populist Zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition*, 39: 541-563.

Mudde, C., & Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2018). Studying populism in comparative perspective: Reflections on the contemporary and future research agenda. *Comparative Political Studies*, 51(13), 1667-1693.