

Call for Papers

Panel

“I, the People”: Populism in the U.S. as Threat and Corrective

As Part of the Section:

Rigging the System – Righting the System: Dimensions of a constitutional, political and societal crisis in the United States

ECPR General Conference, University of Innsbruck, Austria, 22-26 August 2022

Panel Chair:

PD Dr. Claudia Franziska Brühwiler (University St. Gallen),
claudia-franziska.bruehwiler@unisg.ch

He promised to “drain the swamp” and stop the “American carnage,” i.e., stop the economic downward spiral of the white working class and address the alleged dangers in the country’s “inner cities”: President Donald Trump’s election in 2016 changed the U.S. discourse on populism. Initially, President Barack Obama described Trump’s rhetoric as “xenophobic, not populist,” basing his understanding of populism on the U.S. experience with the late 19th century People’s Party and a perception of populism as a corrective. However, the media and scholars quickly pointed out how Trump can be described as a populist in a different sense, namely due to his political style, strategy, and ideology: promising to defend a “pure” people against a “corrupt elite” that is out of touch with everyday life and to restore some imaginary better past (e.g. “Make America great again”), Trump builds on class and racial resentments, tapping into political currents that conservatives had previously held in check. Moreover, Trump can rely on a general sense of pessimism and disaffection—in other words, his election has been a symptom of a more profound crisis in U.S. politics and society.

The storm on the Capitol, the Unite the Right Rallye in Charlottesville, the surge in followers of conspiracy theories like QAnon, the rising fear of as well as tolerance for politically motivated violence, and the level of distrust in the democratic process: These are just a few, albeit the worst, consequences of a divisive presidency and symptoms of a deteriorating political culture.

This panel seeks to explain and dissect these dynamics, and welcomes papers from different theoretical and methodological perspectives. For instance, we would be interested in discussing

- the populist conceptualization of “the people,” “American values,” etc.;
- populist rhetoric as racialized discourse;
- the role of conspiracy theories in (re-)shaping conservative discourse and thought;

- the evolution of left-wing/progressive populism in light of conservative populism's success;
- notions of retribution and justice in the context of Jan. 6;
- and other aspects!

Please send you abstract (max. 500 words) to claudia-franziska.bruehwiler@unisg.ch.

Deadline: Feb. 12, 2022