



The Rise of Populism and the Erosion of Democratic institutions: Evidence from Emerging Democracies

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ABSTRACT

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This study explores how the rise of populism has contributed to the decline of democratic institutions in emerging democracies. Populism has been a major political trend in recent decades in Latin America, South Asia, Eastern Europe, and some African and Southeast Asian countries, and is frequently perceived as a reaction to economic inequality, political corruption, poor governance, and the erosion of citizens' faith in old political elites. In institutional environments marked by fragility and weak accountability, populism is a factor that helps to consolidate democratic backsliding and the progressive erosion of liberal democratic values, this research suggests. The study utilizes a qualitative and comparative research design and secondary data sources such as academic literature, Freedom House reports, V-Dem dataset and World Bank governance indicators. Three of the countries examined (India, Brazil, Turkey) are also included in a multiple case study analysis, which covers a diverse range of regional and institutional settings within emerging democracies, as well as Hungary, the Philippines, and Pakistan. The analysis relies on a theoretical framework that integrates the Populism Theory, Democratic Backsliding Theory, Institutionalism, and Elite Theory for understanding how the mobilization of Populism translates socio-economic grievances into political power and then into the erosion of institutions. The results show that populism regularly harms democracy in five ways: the extension of executive power, the restriction of judicial powers, the control of media, electoral manipulation and the tightening of civil liberties. Despite the variety of forms democratic erosion takes, the following trends are generally observed: Populist leaders consolidate power, reduce institutional constraints, and extremize political systems. The study also shows that socio-economic inequality, political corruption, cultural polarization, and dynamics of digital media are the enabling factors for the populist success. The study finds that the roots of populism are not inherently anti-democratic, but rather it becomes a key force of democratic erosion when it is part of low-quality institutional contexts. To reduce the long-term potential of democratic backsliding in emerging democracies, therefore, it is crucial to build democratic institutions, improve accountability mechanisms, safeguard media freedom and tackle socio-economic inequalities.

Introduction

Global politics have seen a dramatic shift in the twenty-first century, characterized by the quick emergence of populism as a potent and significant political force. Populism is a movement that is commonly described as a political appeal challenging the "pure people" against the "corrupt elite" and has gained unprecedented grip across a wide range of political settings. While populism has had a history of transitory political movements, it is become a continuous and potent phenomenon that shapes the political landscape and political process globally. From the point of view of academics, this resurrection is not coincidental, but rather the result of fundamental changes in political, economic and social institutions in the world of globalization, inequality and suspicion of institutions (Mudde, 2004; Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

Populism is particularly popular in regions where new democracies are consolidating in Latin America, Eastern Europe, South Asia and Africa. While in Latin America it was mainly through populist politicians that distanced themselves from the establishment and adopted a redistributive orientation, in Eastern Europe, it has turned into a nationalist and illiberal mode of operation. Populist rhetoric has resonated with the marginalized and served as a threat to the elites in South Asia and in parts of Africa. In general, populism flourishes when people feel that their democratic institutions are ineffective, unresponsive, or controlled by special interests (Weyland, 2001; Roberts, 2015).

This populism falls in the wake of a worldwide shift in the 1990s from the joy of democratic expansion to the despair of democratic backsliding and autocratization. The Cold War era led to some countries adopting democracy and what came to be known as the "third wave of democratization" (Huntington, 1991). Over the past few decades, many democracies have witnessed a decline in institutional quality and in the freedoms of the civil society and political pluralism. In contrast to the authoritarian takeovers that are often sudden and exogenous (Bermeo, 2016; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018), democratic decline tends to be more gradual and occur because of actions taken by elected leaders.

This change comes in the wake of a dissatisfaction regarding the performance of institutions and elite governance. Democratic trust has waned due to economic disparities, corruption, inadequate services, and political marginalisation. Populist leaders exploit grievances in the public sphere to claim to be the true representatives of the people, who are the ones who were cheated and need his/her help to get popular sovereignty back. This cycle has been observed to be a reaction to the weakness of the democratic system but also a threat to it (Moffitt, 2016; Müller, 2016).

Populism has been linked to the polarization of the political, nationalism, and anti-elite rhetoric. Populist rhetoric often simplifies political realities into oppositional pairings, setting a binary framework that undermines the political consensus and cohesion of a society. The way to "pander to" these populists is through cultural identity, sovereignty, and opposition: Nationalist narratives frequently appeal to the populists by means of cultural identity, sovereignty and opposition: At the same time, the attacks on the political elites, the media, and courts undermine the foundations of democracy (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

Problem Statement

Populism is a serious threat to democratic governance, especially in weak institutionalized emerging democracies. Populism is a response to the public's discontent with elite governance and its promise of increased representation, but it frequently results in the centralization of power and a weakening of important democratic institutions like the judiciary, media and electoral systems. This is a paradox because populism is used in a democratic framework but within it it undermines democracy. Hence, the present study aims at analyzing the impact of populism on the decay of democratic institutions in emerging democracies.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the key factors contributing to the rise of populism in emerging democracies by examining the case studies of Turkey, Philippines India, Brazil and Hungary.
2. To analyze the impact of populist leadership on democratic institutions such as the judiciary, media, and electoral systems.
3. To evaluate the relationship between populism and the process of democratic erosion in emerging democracies in Turkey, Philippines India, Brazil and Hungary.

Literature Review

Political science has conceptualized populism in varying ways, and they give different readings to what it is, as well as how it works. Populism has been analyzed in many different ways in political science, with different readings of what it is and how it operates. Populism then is an ideology, which in certain instances can be considered a "thin-centered ideology," meaning that the ideology is focused on the people, politics should mirror their will and that society is divided into two opposing groups: the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite" (Mudde, 2004). This ideology also asserts that populism is a "thin-centered ideology." This viewpoint places an emphasis on the moral and normative aspects of populism, particularly the populist movement's assertion that it embodies genuine popular sovereignty. The discursive method, on the other hand, conceptualises populism as a political logic through which collective identities are produced by articulating various social demands into a unified "people" against a shared opponent. Laclau (2005) is the most notable individual who has advanced this approach. In the meantime, the strategic approach considers populism to be a political instrument that leaders employ in order to garner the favor of the masses. This is accomplished by developing direct and frequently unmediated contacts with individuals, thereby avoiding the channels that are established by institutions (Weyland, 2001). A key contradiction between "the people" and "the elite," which is at the centre of populist discourse and mobilisation, is a common thread that runs through all of these different methods, despite the fact that these perspectives are different from one another. This conceptual underpinning is crucial to explain how populism functions in a democratic framework while challenging the institutional framework. Consequently, it is directly related to the study of the erosion of democracy in emerging democracies.

Whether to consider populism as a threat to democracy or a mechanism to correct the democratic responsiveness is the debate that is still in the works within the academic literature. On the other hand, some scholars argue that populism poses a risk for liberal democracy because it fosters anti-pluralism, undermines the rights of minorities and undermines political opposition. According to Muller (2016), the reason why the argument is hold is because populist leaders claim to be the sole interpreters of the people's will and because of this, they reject any voice that challenges them and opposes democratic policy. Similarly, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) suggest that one of the hallmarks of a populist leader is an assault on the democratic system, which includes targeting the judiciary, curbing the free media, and undermining checks and balances. At the opposite end of things, there are academics that say that populism is a corrective that brings into focus the failures of elite led governance and undermines the dynamics of democratic engagement. Populism may help to highlight the gap between citizens and political elites by making it visible, as Canovan (1999) suggests. The dual approach demonstrates the multi-faceted nature of populism and the varying effects of populism on democracy, according to the context in which it is perceived. In fledgeling democracies with shaky institutions, however, the negative side effects of populism are more likely to outweigh the positive. It is for this reason that populism is an important part of a democratic erosion.

Democratic erosion, also referred to as 'democratic backsliding,' has become an increasingly central feature of contemporary political analysis, in the wake of evidence of a global decline in the quality of democracy. Bermeo (2016) describes democratic erosion as a slow erosion of democratic institutions, norms and practices. This usually happens in a formal structure of a democratic system. The problems of modern democracy are slow and often subtle, and take shape gradually. This differs from traditional authoritarian regime changes, such as a military coup or dramatic collapse of a government. In most cases, these processes depend on the behavior and successes of elected officials, who manipulate democratic institutions and laws in order to strengthen their own power while giving themselves democratic legitimacy (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Important is the emphasis on incrementalism and legality, which underlines how the democratic system can be disorganized without breaking the rules in the constitution. This will make it more difficult to pinpoint and expose anyone who may wish to defund the democratic process. Given the frequent justification of institutional modification in the name of popular sovereignty by populist leaders, this idea is directly relevant for the study of populism. This is because populist leaders have a proclivity to mix up the distinction between democratic reform and authoritarian consolidation.

While there are various causes that help the erosion of democratic institutions when there is a populist leadership in place, there are links between them. A very common strategy is called 'executive aggrandizement' and involves the gradual expansion of executive power at the expense of other branches of government. This is usually done through the subversion of lawmakers, and the evasion of constitutional restraints (Bermeo, 2016). Judicial capture, in which governments try to influence the judiciary through various means including intimidation, manipulation of appointments and court packing, is another important process. This violates the separation and independence of the judiciary system, thus making it controllable. Media control is also a key factor; because populist leaders are trying to assert themselves as the dominant voices in public discourse, they are trying to curtail the freedom of the media, foster narratives that are favorable to the government and discredit independent reporting (Moffitt, 2016). Further, electoral law changes, electoral procedures and practices that fail to meet democratic standards, and the repression of dissent are

ways of manipulating elections, reducing electoral competition, and undermining the legitimacy of electoral results. Overall, these approaches illustrate the potential for democratically oriented populism to systematically attack institutional checks and balances, and thus to contribute to the overall democratic erosion.

Populism is likely to be more apparent in the emerging democracies, where political systems can often be seen as both unstable and volatile. In such forms of democracy, the institutions tend to be rather weak. This kind of situation can lead to a high level of discontent among citizens, fertile ground for populist mobilisation (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). In emerging democracies, institutional protections are often relatively weak and leave them vulnerable to strongman rule by populist leaders. Studies of various regions, for instance, Latin America, Eastern Europe and South Asia, reveal similar patterns. The patterns are about the populist leaders taking advantage of socio-economic grievances and institutional vulnerabilities to gain and secure power (Roberts, 2015). These dynamics are of particular importance because they shape the link between the two key dynamics of democratic degradation in developing democracies: between populism and institutional fragility.

Even while there is a growing of scholarship on populism and democratic backsliding, there are still a number of significant gaps in knowledge. Much of the research done so far focuses on established democracies, and emerging democracies (in which there are more visible institutional weaknesses) are almost ignored. Moreover, many studies consider populism and the process of democratic decay as separate processes, without in-depth analysis of the interrelated nature of the two processes. Moreover, the extent to which such comprehensive comparative frameworks exist that combine the concepts of populism and institutional studies, especially for the context of building political institutions, is lacking. To bridge such gaps, the aim of this study is to make an integrated and comparative analysis of the effects of the rise of the populism on the erosion of democratic institutions in emerging democracies. This will enable to have a more sophisticated knowledge about the problems that today's democracies have to deal with.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical structure of this research centers on an integrated framework of Populism Theory, Democratic Backsliding Theory, Institutionalism and Elite Theory that explains how the emergence of populism is related to the process of democratic institutions' decay in emerging democracies. Populism is not a monocausal phenomenon, but multidimensional, mediated by institutional, political and socioeconomic factors, which altogether contribute to the democratic results, so a multi-theoretical approach is needed.

Populism Theory (2005) by Ernesto Laclau sees populism as a political logic that constructs the concept of 'the people' against 'the elite', but does not present itself as a body of ideas. This perspective suggests that Populism emerges from the coalescence of a range of social and political claims into a shared political identity and shared sense of "the people. It requires the presence of a common enemy, usually in the form of political elites, institutions or established parties, and as such it is an adversarial formation. As part of the present research, Laclau's paradigm can be used to account for the way in which populist leaders in developing democracies garner support, by denouncing the legitimacy of institutional institutions, and by positioning themselves as the authentic representatives of the people. This process takes on significant importance when it is manifested as political action against the independence and legitimacy of democratic institutions.

Democratic Backsliding Theory is the second strand of the study, in which it is explained how democracies gradually and often legally devolve. Modern democracy has been devoured bit by bit by elected leaders who systematically dismantle institutional checks and balances, rather than being swept away in a sudden coup or revolution (Bermeo, 2016). Moreover, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) argue that "democratically elected autocrats" who use "formal institutions" to consolidate their authority while keeping the "appearance of legality" are the main culprits in the present democratic decline. The answer to the question under investigation is directly relevant to this theory, as it would explain how, once in power, populist leaders would start to damage democratic institutions over time, including the legislatures, judicial systems, media, election systems, etc.

Institutionalism emphasises institutions' centrality to democratic governance, strengthening the analytical framework. Institutions are viewed as the "rules of the game" that govern political conduct and guarantee political systems' predictability, stability, and accountability (North, 1990). Institutions serve as restraints on executive authority in robust democracies, maintaining the balance between the several parts of government. However, institutional flaws in developing democracies, such as a lack of autonomy, corruption, and lax law enforcement, give political players the chance to influence or get around these systems. This institutional weakness favour the emergence of populist politicians who take advantage of this weak structure in order to consolidate their grip on power. Thus, the focus on institutionalism is warranted by the fact that, unlike in well-developed democracies, in nascent democracies populism is more likely to lead to democratic erosion.

By concentrating on the dynamics of power distribution within society, Elite Theory enhances this paradigm. Regardless of a society's democratic form, traditional elite theorists like Mosca and Pareto contend that political power is always concentrated in the hands of a small ruling elite. This notion is seen in the ongoing challenge that populist leaders face to established bureaucratic, political, and economic elites in modern populist politics. In the populist movements these elites are described as corrupt, self-serving, and disconnected from the people (Mudde, 2004). While populist mobilization is about overcoming the elite, it often brings about a shift from one elite group to another, instead of democratization. Populist leaders often mainstream themselves into their own leadership circles to further weaken institutional accountability and pluralism.

This research suggests a combined analytical model that analyses the causal relationship between populism and democratic degradation in emerging democracies in order to integrate these theoretical viewpoints. The paradigm suggests that socioeconomic grievances such as unemployment, inequality, and corruption help to mobilise populists. The paradigm holds that socioeconomic grievances, such as unemployment, inequality and corruption, help mobilise the populists. Laclau's theory of populism suggests that the grievances are then exploited by the populist leader, who establishes a political identity between "the people" and "the elite. Invincible leaders gradually expand the executive authority and diminish democratic checks and balances with the help of the deficiency of institutional checks, as institutionalism would point out. This process is in line with democratic backsliding theory, which argues for the erosion of democratic institutions and norms under elected government. Finally, elite theory is the explanation of how power is focused and restructured, often taking the form of new populist elites replacing old elites, and reinforcing authoritarian tendencies.

What follows is thus a causal cycle that could be summarized as follows: socioeconomic grievances that fuel populist mobilisation, easier emergence of populist leadership, erosion of institutions and democratic decay. This integrated framework provides a comprehensive account of the ways in which populism threatens democratic institutions, particularly in the context of less developed democracies where there is less protection of democratic institutions and greater political instability.

Research Methodology

This study aims to systematically analyze the link between the rise of populism and the decline of democratic institutions in emerging democracies and its methodological approach is in line with this purpose. The nature of the research subject makes a qualitative and comparative research design preferable because it will allow for a detailed understanding of how institutions change, political processes and governance in different country contexts. This approach is particularly suitable in the context of the multi-dimensional and context-dependent nature of populism and democratic degradation, which cannot be fully captured with quantitative methods. Qualitative Study, however, provides a more nuanced analysis of the institutional dynamics, leadership strategies, and political dynamics.

The study employs a case study approach to examine how populist politics is working in different developing democracies and what it has to offer in terms of the erosion of institutions. Case study research is appropriate to make cross-national comparisons but it still provides analytical depth, as it provides a thorough and contextualised analysis of political systems. For this study, a selection of cases is made to identify similarities and differences between the relations of populism and democratic institutions.

All the data sources are secondary, which ensures good and comprehensive empirical basis. Theoretical/analytical approaches to populism and to democratic regression are found in peer-reviewed publications and scholarly journals. Governance metrics and democratic performance and institutional quality are measured at the country level based on reports from international institutions such as the V-Dem Institute, Freedom House and the World Bank. Institutional and political developments unique for each nation are further enhanced by the use of government publications, policy documents and reliable media sources. Together, these sources offer a comprehensive overview of the impact populist leadership on democratic institutions in the longer term.

The case studies were selected through purposive sampling and focus on developing democracies where the populist leadership has had a significant impact on political outcomes. India, Brazil, Turkey, Hungary and Philippines are the selected cases. These countries were chosen due to similarities in a number of characteristics such as electoral democracy, institutional vulnerability, and the presence of strong populist leaders, as well as geographical diversity. The Philippines offers ideas from south-east Asia, while Turkey and Hungary offer a variety of "populist" forms of hybrid government, and Brazil and India serve as models of south Asian governments. These examples together provide a comparative lens to understand how populism and institutionalism are related in different political scenarios.

In addition to these international studies, Pakistan is also included as an interesting case study of a new democracy. One of the most significant examples of the influence of populist narratives and leadership philosophies in Pakistan politics in recent years has been the introduction of the concept of "lifestyle politics". The development of the idea of "lifestyle politics" is one of the most poignant examples of how the concept of populism has affected political discourse in recent years in Pakistan. The rise of populist language that is critical of institutions, holds them to account, and speaks against elites is captured by global populist trends. The structural and historical differences of Pakistan's democratic system do not obstruct the understanding of this relationship between populist communication and political mobilisation and existing fragile institutional structures, but it may provide important insights into it. The study's applicability would be enhanced if it connects the international theoretical discussions with the international political realities in Pakistan. Including Pakistan in the study would enhance its applicability as it would connect the international theoretical discussions with the local political realities.

The data is analysed using thematic and comparative analysis method. Comparative analysis offers a systematic approach to the study of the similarities and differences between individual case studies, particularly in the aspects of democratic quality and institutional effectiveness. Thematic analysis is applied to find recurring patterns such as media domination, judicial interference, presidential aggrandisement and election manipulation. These are concerns that are related to the theoretical framework of institutional erosion and democratic backsliding. In each instance, the level of democratic backsliding is judged on the basis of institutional indicators like judicial independence, media freedom, electoral integrity and governance effectiveness.

Causes of Populism in Emerging Democracies

The evolution of the populist phenomenon in new democracies is a structural phenomenon, not a single political phenomenon, and is a result of deep-rooted economic, political, social, institutional and technical changes. In South Asia, the Americas, Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe, populist movements have surged in some places due to the fact that they are exploiting certain structural weaknesses in the democratic systems in all of these areas. The section analyses the main drivers of populism and traces parallels between these drivers and the data found in a representative sample of case studies (including India, Brazil, Turkey, Hungary, the Philippines and Pakistan). The discussion suggests that, according to Norris and Inglehart (2019) and Mudde (2004), populism is essentially a reaction to failures in government, fragility of institutions and socio-economic grievances. These will set the stage for the rise of anti-elite mobilization and democratic instability.

Aspects of the Economy

One of the largest contributors to populism in developing democracies is grievance over the economy, which is common amongst citizens in developing countries, where social mobility is stunted. This discontent is because of the lack of equality, lack of jobs and unequal wealth distribution. Domestic labour markets have been exposed to worldwide competition as a result of globalisation, which has led to job insecurity and pay stagnation. This has further exacerbated the pressures that are already there.

Norris and Inglehart (2019) argue that populism is linked to cultural backlash and economic insecurity which is a result of the processes of globalisation and neoliberalism. The issue of economic disparity is not only a statistical one in developing democracies; rather, it is a political one since it has a direct impact on people's conceptions of fairness and the legitimacy of the state.

In Brazil, the foundations for populist rhetoric that emphasises anti-elite emotion were created by the economic recession and corruption scandals that occurred after the recession. Similarly, the economic and political power of the populist leaders in Turkey has been used as an excuse to centralise economic and political power in the face of economic instability and inflation.. The increasing rate of unemployment and the hardship that rural areas are experiencing in India have fuelled narratives of exclusion and nationalist economic resurgence.

In Pakistan, continuous inflation, dependence on debt, and unemployment have all contributed to public anger with traditional political elites. This frustration has enabled populist narratives that emphasise accountability and anti-corruption. In spite of this, structural economic issues have not been overcome, which contributes to the perpetuation of cycles of populist participation.

Table 1: Economic Drivers of Populism in Case Studies

Country	Key Economic Issue	Populist Response Strategy
India	Unemployment, inequality	Nationalist economic revival narrative
Brazil	Recession, corruption	Anti-elite mobilization
Turkey	Inflation, instability	Centralized economic control
Hungary	EU-driven inequality debates	Sovereignty-based economic framing
Philippines	Poverty and inequality	Strongman welfare promises
Pakistan	Debt, inflation, unemployment	Anti-corruption discourse

Political Factors

The roots of populism can be found in several fundamental political issues such as political instability, poor governance, and rampant corruption. In many developing democracies, citizens' trust in political institutions is slipping because they cannot hold the institutions accountable, make them transparent, or effectively govern them. Populist leaders exploit these weaknesses by claiming to be outsiders who offer to topple the political system that is bungled and tainted.

Levitsky and Ziblatt point to political parties and institutions losing their legitimacy as a breeding ground for populism in their 2018 article. It is now possible for populist leaders to circumvent traditional political organisations and develop direct contacts with voters as a result of the weakening of party systems and rivalry among elites.

Uncontent with the post-transitional political elites in Hungary, illiberal governance emerged. The populist leadership of the Turkish state was able to shore up its power by demonizing opposition parties as threats to the stability of the nation. Narratives that were fundamental to populist legitimacy in the Philippines were those that were anti-elite and anti-crime.

The trust that people placed in institutions in Pakistan has been continuously shaken due to the political instability, frequent changes in the leadership and allegations of corruption. Even though populist narratives often focus on accountability and “clean governance”, there are still institutional weaknesses, allowing populist discourses to have a political impact.

Social and Cultural Factors

There are a number of factors that greatly contribute to populist mobilisation, including social fragmentation, identity politics, nationalism, and worries relating to migration. In societies that are undergoing rapid demographic and social change, as well as cultural polarisation, populism frequently gains strength through these processes.

Populism is not just an economic phenomenon, it is a “political style,” a set of stories that is emotional and cultural, as Moffitt (2016) points out. National identity becomes a powerful tool of mobilisation especially if it is connected to a threat from the outside or cultural differences within the country.

Religious nationalism has played an important role in shaping the discourse of the Populist in India. Anti-immigration sentiment has been part and parcel of the populist political movement in Hungary. Such identity narratives, which fuse together notions of nationalism with religion, have contributed to the legitimisation of the populist movements in Turkey. There has been an increase in support for strongman leadership in Brazil and the Philippines as a result of societal polarisation and anxiousness around criminal activity.

In Pakistan there are many complex issues of identity politics, religious narratives and rivalry among civil and military as a part of a populist context. Political legitimacy often comes in a moral/ideological way in this context, not as a result of institutional functioning.

Institutional Weakness

In weak democracies, one of the most crucial factors that renders the concept of populism feasible is the presence of feeble governments and institutions. Democratic institutions (electoral organisations, legislature, court) that are unable to operate

independently are vulnerable to the capture by those within the political establishment. All forms of institutions are “rules of the game” as defined by North (1990), and the power to manipulate them for personal or political advantage lies with the political actors when there is not a consistent application or even a lack of application of the rules.

Bermeo (2016) argues that democratic backsliding is more likely to take place in relatively weak institutions. This is because the elected leaders can gradually erode checks and balances and have no immediate consequences.

In Turkey and Hungary, the decrease of democracy has been mostly blamed on the decline of the institutions, and the dominance of the executive branch of government over the judicial and the media institutions. Political polarization and corruption crises have been tried to be contained by institutional mechanisms in Brazil, but without success. Concerns have been raised in India on issues of judicial independence and freedom of the media. Under the direction of a strong executive leadership, the limits imposed by institutions in the Philippines have been greatly reduced.

One of the recurring issues in Pakistan is the weakness of the institutions, especially with respect to independence of judiciary, consistency of government and relationship between the civil and military. In the presence of these vulnerabilities, conditions are created in which populist narratives have the potential to quickly gain traction by portraying institutions as being ineffectual or prejudiced.

Media and Technology

In an era of growing social media and digital communication, the face of political mobilisation has completely changed. Populist leaders are increasingly playing an important role via digital platforms, and are making them more significant in order to circumvent traditional media and go straight to the populace. It is a form of direct communication which can be more engaging, more likely to be misleading and to exacerbate politicisation.

Norris and Inglehart (2019) argue that digital media ecosystems are a part of the polarisation trend and lead to the creation of ideological echo chambers. Moffitt (2016) goes on to say that the logic of the media also reinforces populism as a political discourse, as it emphasizes conflict and sensationalism.

Social media plays a crucial role in shaping political narratives and galvanising support in India. Several studies have investigated how communities of political communication use WhatsApp in Brazil, as it plays an important role in the dissemination of misinformation. Within the context of Turkey, public discourse has been moulded by the combination of official control over the media and internet control. Pluralistic expression has been hampered in Hungary as a result of government control over media ownership. It has become vital to use social media platforms in the Philippines in politics and narrative management.

Political discussions have become vital on several social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter (X), and YouTube in Pakistan. They are often identified as having polarisation, misinformation and emotions. This has greatly extended the reach of the populist propaganda, while at the same time undermining the historical gatekeeping function of journalism.

The selected cases clearly show that where economic grievances, political discontent, feeling of cultural polarization, lack of institutional strength, and disruption of digital media all exist, the rise of populism is more likely. Though the intensity and characteristics of populism varies regionally, the basic structural factors remain relatively unchanged. It is demonstrated in this section that populism in developing democracies is not the result of a random occurrence but rather is the result of a structural production that is influenced by interwoven economic, political, social, institutional, and technical elements. Collectively, these factors produce an atmosphere in which populist leaders are able to successfully mobilise public dissatisfaction and attack democratic institutions that are already in place. The findings provide clear support for the larger point that this thesis is attempting to make, which is that populism, once it is in power, contributes considerably to the breakdown of democratic institutions through processes that are both slow and systemic.

Populism and Democratic Erosion

This section discusses the study's main finding: populism in emerging democracies erodes democratic institutions. Modern democratic decline occurs through legal, gradual, and institutional procedures that reduce checks and balances while appearing democratic (Bermeo, 2016; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Institutional weakening is similar in India, Brazil, Turkey, Hungary, the Philippines, and Pakistan, but severity and form vary by political situation.

Executive Power Expansion

The concentration of power in the hands of the executive branch is one of the most notable characteristics of populist governments. It is common for populist leaders to defend this consolidation of power by asserting that they have received a direct mandate from "the people." In doing so, they pose institutional limits as barriers to democratic will. This is consistent with the theory that Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) developed, which states that elected leaders have the power to gradually undermine democratic systems from within by undermining horizontal accountability.

Executive aggrandizement often entails the centralization of decision-making authority, the circumvention of legislative oversight, and the reduction of the autonomy of subnational governments by the executive branch. Constitutional revisions in Turkey greatly enlarged the powers of the president, so consolidating the executive branch's position of authority. There has been a reduction in parliamentary scrutiny in Hungary as a result of executive authority over policymaking. Executive-legislative disputes in Brazil have been a contributing factor in the country's institutional instability. Concerns have been made in India regarding the growing concentration of executive authority, particularly in regards to the relationship between the federal government and the local state government.

The extension of executive power in Pakistan is frequently influenced by a complicated civil-military and bureaucratic structure. In this framework, the authority to govern can be transferred between different institutions, which contributes to an inconsistent relationship between the institutions. For the sake of accountability and anti-corruption measures, populist political narratives frequently justify forceful executive action as required. However, this frequently results in the weakening of institutional checks and balances.

Table 1: Executive Power Expansion in Case Studies

Country	Pattern of Executive Expansion	Key Impact on Democracy
Turkey	Presidential centralization	Weak parliamentary oversight
Hungary	Party-state consolidation	Reduced institutional autonomy
Brazil	Executive-legislative conflict	Political instability
India	Centralization of federal authority	Strained federal balance
Philippines	Strong executive leadership	Weak institutional checks
Pakistan	Hybrid power structure	Institutional inconsistency

Judiciary Undermining

Independence of the judiciary is a fundamental component of democratic administration; nonetheless, populist regimes frequently make efforts to undermine the judiciary in order to lessen the legal limits that are placed on executive power. For example, court-packing, the manipulation of judicial appointments, and the use of political pressure to judges are all components of this process. The author Bermeo (2016) asserts that judicial capture is one of the most prevalent techniques that contribute to the deterioration of democratic principles in modern regimes.

Reforms to the judicial system in Hungary have resulted in a major increase in the political influence over the courts. Judicial independence in Turkey has been undermined as a result of widespread purges of the court that have occurred in response to political crises. Relations between the executive branch and the judicial branch in Brazil have been increasingly politicised in recent years. Debates concerning the independence of the judiciary have become more heated in India as a result of worries over the influence of politics in appointment processes. Throughout the period of strongman administration in the Philippines, the judicial system has been subjected to political pressure.

Due to the fact that there are frequent confrontations between the judiciary, the executive branch, and other power centers in Pakistan, judicial independence has historically been a contentious issue in the country. Populist narratives often focus on 'accountability through courts' but it is important that politicization does not compromise the neutrality of institutions.

Media Suppression

Another crucial pillar of the institutional framework that has been undermined in a populist administration is media freedom. In the history of populist politics, the concept of "enemies of the people" has served to legitimize censorship, regulatory pressure and control over information flows (Muller 2016). It is a story often employed to label independent media members. That results in a reduction of plurality, and a growth of power exercised by the state or executive branch in public discourse.

The government has imposed closures and restrictions on several media outlets critical of the government in Turkey. In Hungary, the ownership of the media has been increasingly concentrated among actors who are supportive of the government. The media's credibility and independence in Brazil has been seriously affected by the polarization of the political landscape. There have been concerns made in India regarding the increased pressure that is being placed on independent journalists. The media organizations in the Philippines have been confronted with a variety of legal and political problems.

The environment in which media freedom is exercised in Pakistan is extremely complicated, with political, institutional, and regulatory restraints all having an impact on the situation. As the amount of digital media has grown, so has its role in political communication, yet also in its role of polarizing and disseminating misinformation, a tactic often exploited by populist actors in shaping public opinion.

Electoral Manipulation

However, populist administrations frequently strive to modify election systems in order to maintain their political control, despite the fact that electoral integrity is critically important for democratic legitimacy. The modification of electoral laws, the weakening of electoral commissions, the restriction of opposition involvement, and the manipulation of campaign environments are all examples of this process.

In their 2018 article, Levitsky and Ziblatt suggest that the decline of democracy frequently starts with minor modifications to electoral laws that disadvantage opposition groups while retaining nominal democratic procedures.

The election reforms that have been implemented in Hungary have been criticised for favouring the ruling parties. Existence of electoral competition in Turkey is accompanied with conditions that are becoming increasingly unequal. There has been an increase in institutional stress in Brazil as a result of electoral polarisation. A number of concerns have been expressed in India with relation to the impartiality of campaigns and the impartiality of institutions. Electoral politics in the Philippines continue to be highly individualised and focused on candidates.

Historically, the election procedures in Pakistan have been impacted by the complexity of the institutions involved and the difficulties that are associated with administration. Despite the fact that populist narratives frequently place an emphasis on electoral "fairness" and "accountability," structural problems with election administration continue to exist.

Civil Liberties Decline

The progressive restriction of civil freedoms, such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association, is a significant consequence of policies that are implemented by populist governments. It goes without saying that populist politicians have been known to make such arguments in defense of those limits, claiming that they are necessary to maintain order, unity, or combat corruption. However, it is important to note that these policies often have disproportionate effects on opposition parties, civil society organisations and voices of dissent (Mudde, 2004 and others).

There has been a considerable increase in the number of limitations placed on civil society activities and demonstrations in Turkey. In Hungary, organizations that are part of civil society are subject to regulatory constraints. Polarization has been a contributing factor in maintaining tensions in Brazil about civil rights. An growing amount of scrutiny has been directed towards protests and dissident movements in India. The strong executive policies that have been implemented in the Philippines have had an impact on civil liberties.

The intricate interplay of legal, political, and security factors in Pakistan is what plays a role in shaping civil rights in the country. Protests in public and political activism are not without their existence, but they frequently take place within institutional settings that are restricted. Politicians Often resort to populist language in discussion of civil liberties in terms of accountability and national interest.

Comprehensive study of democratic erosion mechanisms in a comparative context.

Although there are variations according to context, the analysis of the case studies shows that the process of democracy undermining the populism is more or less systematic. These processes have all led to the gradual erosion of democratic institutions together. Consequently, democratic institutions are increasingly being undermined.

Table 2: Mechanisms of Democratic Erosion Across Cases

Mechanism	Common Pattern Across Countries	Democratic Impact
Executive expansion	Centralization of authority	Weak separation of powers
Judicial undermining	Political influence over courts	Loss of legal independence
Media suppression	Control of narratives and ownership changes	Reduced pluralism
Electoral manipulation	Rule changes and uneven competition	Weak electoral fairness
Civil liberties decline	Restrictions on dissent and protests	Reduced democratic participation

This section, by outlining how the erosion of key institutional supports can foster populist developments, suggests that populism can play a role in weakening democratic institutions. The methods that populist leaders use to rule typically undermine the institutional foundations of democracy, even if populist leaders have generally been elected democratically. The comparative evidence from India, Brazil, Turkey, Hungary, the Philippines and Pakistan shows that the breakdown of democratic institutions is not a sudden, but steady and legal, and institutionally entrenched one. This conclusion offers important evidence for the central thesis of this book: Populism helps to undermine democratic institutions in emerging democracies (Bermeo, 2016; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

Case Studies

The purpose of this section is to present a comparative examination of a selection of emerging democracies in order to gain an understanding of how populism functions in various political situations and how it leads to the deterioration of democratic institutions. The cases of India, Brazil, Turkey, Hungary, the Philippines, and Pakistan were chosen because they are representative of a variety of regional, cultural, and institutional contexts. However, they have common characteristics such as elective democracy, political volatility, and varied degrees of institutional weakness. Through institutional weakening, polarization, and executive domination, populism continuously leads to democratic strain, as shown by the comparative data (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Bermeo, 2016). This is the case even if populism can take on a variety of forms.

India: Rise of Majoritarian Populism and Institutional Pressure

India serves as a prominent illustration of how populism can evolve as a result of majoritarian nationalism. In this setting, populism is intimately associated with religious identity politics, which is characterized by the expanding definition of "the people" through the use of cultural and religious narratives that are representative of the majority. The author Jaffrelot (2021) asserts that this particular strain of populism has rethought the concept of political legitimacy in India by combining elements of nationalism and electoral democracy.

Concerns have been voiced over the increased pressure that is being placed on the autonomy of institutions, particularly the judiciary, the media, and civil society, despite the fact that India continues to be a competitive democracy. According to Norris and Inglehart (2019), critics believe that the growing polarisation of the political landscape has led to a reduction in the room for dissent and an increase in the influence of the executive branch on institutions. Because of the growing influence of corporations and politicians, the independence of the media has also been called into doubt.

Characteristics that are unique to India:

- Populism that is founded on majoritarian nationalism
- The growing polarisation of political opposition

- Pressure from institutions on the judicial system and the media
- Restrictions imposed by civil society

Brazil: Leadership Style and Democratic Strain

Brazil serves as an example of populism's ability to function through the use of anti-elite rhetoric and a strong leadership style without immediately resulting in the collapse of institutions. Corruption, law and order, and a lack of trust in established political elites have been the primary topics of discussion in Brazil with populist opposition.

In their 2018 article, Levitsky and Ziblatt suggest that Brazil is a reflection of the susceptibility of democratic institutions when they are confronted with profound political polarisation. Despite the fact that democratic institutions continue to exist in their original form, their efficiency is being diminished as a result of political conflict and a diminishing faith in party systems.

A further strengthening of populist narratives has occurred as a result of economic crises and corruption scandals. This has made it possible for political players from the outside to gain legitimacy by presenting themselves as alternatives to the system.

Characteristics that are unique to Brazil:

- A discourse that is populist and anti-corruption Legitimacy of the party system is lacking
- Tension and polarisation within academic institutions
- Uncertainty in the economy as a leading factor

Turkey: Shift Toward Authoritarian Consolidation

In Turkey, populism has played a role in contributing to a shift toward centralized and authoritarian rule, making it an example of democratic erosion that is further along in its progression. Leaders in Turkey who adhere to the populist ideology combine strong executive authority with a strong sense of national and religious identity.

After massive political shifts, there was a significant reorganization of institutions, which had a particularly profound impact on the judicial system and the media. According to Yilmaz and Bashirov (2018), Turkey is an example of the change of competitive democracy into a form of "competitive authoritarianism," which is characterised by the presence of elections that are not completely fair.

By implementing constitutional amendments, the executive branch has become more dominant, while the freedom of the media has greatly decreased.

Characteristics that are unique to Turkey:

- A strong Presidential system.
- This may be because of censorship and restrictions on the media.
- A weakening of the judicial system
- Authoritarianism: a tendency to be authoritarian and competitive.

Hungary: Illiberal Democracy Model

Hungary is considered an example of "illiberal democracy" because although in name a democratic state, it has many of the characteristics of a democracy that are severely curtailed. The aim of the constitutional and institutional changes has been to centralize power in a populist government at the same time retaining the appearance of electoral legitimacy and support.

Bánkuti, Halmai, and Scheppele (2012) point to the country of Hungary as a case in point for how liberal democratic structures can be torn apart from within by means of legal and constitutional processes. The levels of institutional independence have been severely diminished as a result of electoral reforms, judicial restructuring, and media concentration. According to Mudde (2019), Hungary serves as an example of how populism can progressively turn a liberal democracy into a hybrid government throughout the course of its existence.

Important characteristics of Hungary are as follows:

- Reorganization of the state constitution
- Concentration of the media under the influence of the state
- An advantage in the elections for the party in power
- Weak institutions on the other side

Philippines: Populism and Strongman Politics

Strongman leadership and anti-crime narratives are two characteristics that are characteristic of populism, as is exemplified by the Philippines. A populist form of government places an emphasis on direct engagement with the populace and presents institutional limits as impediments to efficient rule.

According to Thompson (2016), academics contend that populism in the Philippines has resulted in a reduction in the level of institutional responsibility, notably in terms of human rights and the independence of the judiciary. Leadership is now centred on authority and direct appeal to the people, and political discourse has become increasingly personalised based on these characteristics.

Aspects that are essential to the Philippines:

- Strongman style of business management
- Politics that is populist and anti-crime
- Inadequate institutional safeguards
- Concerns around civil liberties

Pakistan: Populism, Institutional Fragility, and Political Polarization

As part of the context of emerging democracies, Pakistan is a unique case study as it is a nation where populist narratives have converged with the institutional vulnerability. In Pakistan, populism is often voiced in the anti-corruption rhetoric, anti-elite rhetoric and demanding accountability. These expressions carry a lot of weight in terms of public discontent over the shortcomings of public governance.

In recent years, populist political groups have focused on direct appeals to the masses, of which they see representatives of the political elites as corrupt and incompetent. The political system of Pakistan, however, is complex and has a number of institutional dynamics. All of these elements influence the direction of populist politics, such as civil-military relations, bureaucracy and judicial activism.

Pakistan's democratic institutions are yet to consolidate in a significant manner, and are left constantly under threat due to political instability, subdued party organizations and inefficiencies in governance (Freedom House, 2024; V-Dem Institute, 2024). Populist rhetoric often embellishes the public's frustration, while at the same time it does not necessarily translate into lasting institutional change. Rather, it results in the alternation of polarisation by opposing political parties.

In contrast to situations such as Hungary or Turkey, Pakistan's populism functions within an institutional structure that is more fluid and in which power is diffused across numerous centers. In spite of this, democratic erosion is nevertheless susceptible to institutional weakening through the politicisation of accountability narratives and administrative instability. Additionally, this makes democratic decay less linear.

Pakistan's most notable characteristics are as follows:

- A discourse that is populist and anti-corruption
- The fragmentation of institutions and the presence of competition
- Complexity of public-military relations in politics

- Volatility and polarisation in the electoral process

Comparative Overview of Case Studies

A constant association between populism and democratic strain is demonstrated across all of the studied cases, despite the fact that the severity of the relationship and the outcomes both vary. Regardless of the environment, populism is dependent on anti-elite narratives and criticism of institutions; yet, the influence of populism is contingent upon the strength of institutions and the political history of the country.

Table 3: Comparative Summary of Populism and Democratic Strain

Country	Type of Populism	Institutional Impact	Key Feature of Erosion
India	Majoritarian populism	Moderate	Identity polarization
Brazil	Anti-elite populism	Moderate	Institutional tension
Turkey	Nationalist populism	High	Executive dominance
Hungary	Illiberal populism	High	Constitutional restructuring
Philippines	Strongman populism	Moderate-High	Civil liberties decline
Pakistan	Anti-corruption populism	Moderate-Unstable	Institutional fragmentation

The evidence presented in this chapter illustrates that populism is a multi-faceted phenomena that manifests itself in a variety of ways across emerging democracies, but it always interacts with institutional deficiencies. Some countries have more advanced democratic failure, like Turkey or Hungary, and some countries have more advanced institutional failure, like India or Brazil. In Pakistan, however, it is a rather complex hybrid situation that can be characterized by institutional polarization and political volatility. The roundup of these cases, in part, supports the thesis's primary argument that when embedded in weak institutional environments, populism can lead to democratic strain and the slow erosion of democratic institutions in legal, political and discursive ways (Bermeo, 2016; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

Comparative Analysis

This section aims to offer a synthesis of the information gathered from the case studies selected, with the aim of uncovering common trends, distinctions, leadership dynamics, and geographical variations in the link between populism and democratic erosion in emerging democracies. Populism manifests in diverse ways across the globe and the comparative analysis reveals that it consistently helps to weaken a democracy in similar ways, both politically and institutionally (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Bermeo, 2016). This suggests that populism plays a role in the deterioration of democracy.

Common Patterns

The three common features that stand out across all of the countries examined (including India, Brazil, Turkey, Hungary, the Philippines and Pakistan) are anti-elite rhetoric, institutional decay and political polarization.

In the first place, anti-elite rhetoric is a characteristic that is present in every instance of populist discourse. According to Mudde (2004), populist politicians continually develop a political narrative that divides society into "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite." This divides society in a way that delegitimises traditional political actors and institutions. While simultaneously diminishing the effectiveness of institutional mediation, this rhetorical tactic is employed to justify direct appeals to the general public.

Second, a common consequence of populist administration is the erosion of institutions among the population. populist leaders have, in the majority of instances, either directly or indirectly undermined the independence of the judiciary, the media, and the integrity of the election process. According to Bermeo (2016), this type of democratic disintegration is often gradual and legalistic, which not only makes it less obvious but also makes it extremely successful.

The third point is that populist leadership leads to an increase in polarisation. Norris and Inglehart (2019) suggest that populism increases societal differences by strengthening identity-based politics and cultural backlash, which further destabilises democratic consensus.

Variations Based on Individual Cases

There are significant disparities between examples, despite the fact that there are common patterns. These differences are attributable to changes in cultural context and institutional resiliency.

Countries such as Hungary and Turkey exhibit more advanced institutional disintegration as a result of stronger executive consolidation, whereas India and Brazil are examples of more competitive democracies that are becoming increasingly polarised. In a more fluid case, institutional fragmentation in Pakistan does not lead to a linear decline of democratic governance but always to instability.

One of the key things that affects the results is the strength of the institution. More powerful legal and bureaucratic institutions can help slow down the breakdown of democratic institutions, and less powerful institutions can help speed up the development of populist institutions (North, 1990).

Role of Leadership

The face of populism, and its undermining of democratic institutions, is powerfully shaped by who occupies the leadership posts. In each case, charismatic leadership is a key aspect of populist government, in which the leadership emerges from the people, or from popular consent, and is not rooted in institutions.

This personalisation of power reduces the power of formal institutions and leads to an elevation of informal power in the shape of individual power. According to the authors (2018) Levitsky and Ziblatt, these leaders often weaken democratic norms from within, but at the same time maintain the credibility of elections.

Therefore, charismatic authority becomes an essential mechanism through which populism converts democratic institutions into political structures that are centralised and led by the leadership of the populace.

Variations Across The Regions

Comparative analysis of different regions indicates significant differences in the way populism functions.

The populist movement in Latin America (Brazil) is frequently fuelled by economic crises, scandals involving corruption, and anti-establishment feeling inside the country. It has a tendency to fluctuate in accordance with economic cycles and the instability of institutions.

Within the Asian region, specifically India, the Philippines, and Pakistan, populism is more strongly associated with identity politics, challenges to governance, and powerful executive narratives. According to Norris and Inglehart (2019), in examples like these, cultural and religious identities play a more significant role in the process of political mobilisation.

In Europe (Hungary, Turkey), populism is more institutionalised and frequently results in long-term structural changes in government. These changes can include constitutional revisions and the consolidation of the media or other institutions.

These contrasts between regions illustrate that populism is a phenomenon that occurs all over the world; nevertheless, the institutional influence of populism is strongly dependent on the political structures and historical settings of individual countries.

The Final Words of the Chapter

The comparative research demonstrates that populism is a multifaceted phenomena that has impacts that are both universal and peculiar to the setting in which it is observed. There are variations in leadership style, institutional strength, and regional political culture that define the intensity and form of democratic erosion. While anti-elite rhetoric, institutional weakening, and polarisation are common in all circumstances, these variances impact the way in which democratic erosion occurs. In general, the data provide significant support for the basic argument of this thesis, which states that populism leads to the demise of democracy through the gradual weakening of institutions, particularly in developing democracies that have political systems that are fragile (Bermeo, 2016; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Mudde, 2004).

Discussion

In view of the primary research problem, which is how the growth of populism leads to the degradation of democratic institutions in emerging democracies, this chapter provides an interpretation of the empirical and comparative findings of the study. It takes part in the normative discussion on populism, analyses the implications that populism has for democratic legitimacy, and contemplates the long-term consequences that populism has for democratic resilience. In addition to this, it provides insights that are useful to policy in order to build institutional frameworks. The discussion is founded on well-established research on populism and democratic regression (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Bermeo, 2016; Muller, 2016). They provide the foundation for the discussion.

When it comes to the normative debate, is populism anti-democratic?

The problem of whether populism should be considered an inherently anti-democratic movement or instead as a corrective to democracy is one of the most widely debated issues in political science. Populism is seen by some as undermining liberal democratic values such as pluralism, minority rights and institutional checks and balances. Discussing populism on the other hand, it is a position that is often criticized. In his article from 2016 Muller states that populism is inherently anti-pluralist, because it claims to stand for the "people" as their sole moral voice, thus rendering opposition and other viewpoints illegitimate. Similarly, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) point to the practice of democratically undemocratic politicians attacking from within democratic institutions that hold executive power.

On the other side, there are academics who believe that populism is more of a reaction to democratic shortcomings than it is a rejection of democracy itself. In this perspective, populism emerges as a corrective mechanism that exposes the inadequacies of the elites, corruption and representation (Canovan, 1999). Therefore, rather than being the cause of democratic weakness, it might be considered as a symptom of democratic weakness.

The findings of this study point to a dual interpretation: populism does not have an anti-democratic origin in and of itself; but, the governance outcomes of populism in nascent democracies frequently produce anti-democratic repercussions due to the fragility of the institutions involved.

The Relationship Between Populism and Democratic Legitimacy (Specialisation against Institutionalism)

The underlying contradiction that exists between popular representation and institutional democracy is brought to light by populism. Populist leaders assert that they have direct legitimacy from the people, and they frequently argue that the "true will" of the majority is impeded by the checks and balances that are in place within institutions. This presents a challenge to the liberal democratic philosophy, which places an emphasis on the necessity of legitimacy being mediated through institutions, laws, and constitutional frameworks.

According to Mudde (2004), populism simplifies political reality into a moral binary situation of "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite". This raises political involvement but at the same time undermines the effectiveness of institutional mediation and pluralist decision making. In developing democracies this friction is even stronger due to the already weak institutional strength.

The case studies show that in practice the concept of populist legitimacy often supersedes institutional legitimacy, the latter being replaced by personal or charismatic authority as a result. This is to weaken accountability institutions and strengthen the executive branch of government, which in turn will reduce democratic institutionalism.

Implications for the Long Term: contrasted with Collapse, Democratic Resilience

The longer lasting the impact of populism on the democracy, the longer the institutions are likely to be durable. Populism can disrupt political systems in the short term, but have a low impact over the longer term, in political systems with strong institutions. Populism, however, can be a catalyst for the gradual erosion of democratic institutions and/or the development of hybrid regimes in nascent democracies with weak institutional protections. The author Bermeo (2016) contends that the modern democratic decline is not characterised by a catastrophic collapse but rather by the gradual degradation of democratic principles gradually over time. In addition, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) raise attention to the fact that elected officials have the ability to systematically undermine democracy while yet preserving the formal validity of elections.

Three potential long-term paths are suggested by the findings of this study, which are as follows:

- The resilience of democracy, which occurs when institutions are able to withstand pressure from populists (in some situations).
- The erosion of democracy, which occurs as institutions gradually get weaker (in most circumstances)
- Hybrid regimes, such as Turkey and Hungary, in which elections continue to take place but liberal democracy is deteriorating.
- By demonstrating that populism does not necessarily result in the collapse of democratic institutions, this illustrates that populism greatly increases the vulnerability to institutional degradation.

Policy-Implications

This study yields a number of important policy implications for democratic institutions in emerging democracies. Structural changes are needed to develop resilience in a democratic direction. This is because populism feeds on the lack of good governance and mistrust of institutions.

First, the institutions, such as those of the judiciary, electoral commissions and legislatures, need to be strengthened so that there are checks and balances on the power of the executive. When independent institutions are in place, there is a decrease in the capacity of populist politicians to concentrate power.

Second, it is imperative to build up accountability mechanisms. These include anti-corruption policies, frameworks and the scrutiny of laws. To regain public trust in existing institutions, it is essential to restore trust in them, Norris and Inglehart (2019) argue.

Thirdly, the safeguarding of media freedom and civil society contributes to strengthen democratic pluralism and to prevent polarisation and misinformation.

Finally, political inclusion and responsive government can help deal with the core drivers of populism by reducing inequalities, improving service delivery and increasing citizens' participation in government.

In this chapter, populism is demonstrated to hold a rather complex position in democratic theory. Although it can be a response to real concerns about democratic processes, the combination of this phenomenon and the mixed institutional development of developing democracies often leads to negative consequences for liberal democracy. The basic interaction that is latent to this dynamic is the interaction between representation versus institutionalism. Finally, the impact of populism will rely not only on leadership actions, but also on the viability and viability of democratic institutions in the long term.

Conclusion

This study aimed at exploring the link between the emergence of populism and democratic institutional decay in emerging democracies. The key idea throughout the whole thesis is that populism can arise as a response to real socio-economic and political grievances, though it can also be used in the course of democratic backsliding, when it takes place in permafragile institutional structures. This study has shown that populism is not the same, but rather a political process that is shaped by the context, and always encounters institutional fragility and structures to alter the type of democratic government. This was achieved by comparing India, Brazil, Turkey, Hungary, Philippines and Pakistan.

The research conducted led to the development of the theoretical framework that integrated the Populism Theory, the Democratic Backsliding Theory, the Institutionalism and the Elite Theory to explain the evolution of a populist mobilization towards institutional erosion. A moral and political difference between "the people" and "the elite" is constructed by populism, according to the conceptualisations of Laclau (2005) and Mudde (2004). This division facilitates leaders to get legitimacy by making direct appeal to masses. The results of this research, however, show that this form of political legitimacy is often bypassing the constraints institutions set themselves; and, over time, it is undermining liberal democratic institutions.

Although the extent of populism and its expressions vary by location, the comparative case studies presented here demonstrate that comparable trends of democratic erosion can be seen. Populism has contributed to the polarization and to the pressure on independence of institutions in both India and Brazil. Populism has also been developing in Turkey and Hungary, resulting in more sophisticated forms of executive domination and constitutional changes. Strongman populism can be a threat to freedom of expression and accountability systems in the Philippines. In Pakistan it's more fluid, yet unstable, and an example of the intersection between populist discourse and existing institutional disarticulations and governance problems.

The study revealed that there are five key ways in which populism can contribute to the decay of democratic institutions. These are the extension of executive authority, the intrusions on judicial power, the stifling of media freedom and the tampering with and corruption of electoral processes and the diminishing of civil liberties rights. The gradual nature of modern democratic backsliding is reinforced by the fact that these mechanisms take place in a gradual manner and regularly in the legal space. This aligns with Bermeo (2016) who states this is congruent with the argument. In a new book, Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) offer further evidence for this idea, emphasizing the capacity of elected government officials to undermine democratic institutions from within and appear fully democratic.

The study also underlined the fact that populism has deep roots in structural conditions such as economic inequality, political corruption, institutional weakness, cultural polarisation, and the advent of digital media ecosystems. All these are factors that contribute to their development. These elements create an atmosphere that is more favorable for the mobilization of populist ideologies due to the erosion of popular trust in current political institutions and the assistance to leaders' capacity to present themselves as alternatives to current elites. However, in the short term, populism can serve as a corrective mechanism to shortfalls in democracy; in the long term, populist government outcomes often have negative impacts on institutional stability and democratic consolidation.

The results of this research could have important theoretical and practical implications. The paper offers a theoretical contribution to the understanding of the concept of Populism as both a political logic and a way of governing, which in turn relates with the institutional architecture in a complex manner in different ways. It highlights from practice the importance of strengthening democratic governance, the judiciary, the media, accountability and tackling socio-economic inequalities as key instruments to mitigate the risk of populist governance.

Finally, the results of this research show that, where democratic institutions are not adequately protecting citizens, populism can be a strong force in the erosion of democratic institutions in developing democracies. However, the impact it has is not preordained. Ultimately, the fate of democracy in the presence of populist pressure relies on the strengths of institutions, civil society and the ability of democratic systems to adapt to challenges from politics and society. All these aspects must be strengthened, if we want to ensure the continued resilience of democratic institutions in the presence of the emergence of populist parties.

Policy Recommendations

The results of this study indicate that populism poses the highest threat to democratic institutions in weaker institutional settings, lacking accountability, transparency, and rule of law. Therefore, the policy focus should be on consolidating democratic institutions, in order to limit the power of the president and the personalisation of politics. In nascent democracies, it is important that independent institutions, such as the judiciary, electoral commissions and monitoring institutions, have constitutional provisions to reduce political influence in the nomination and promotion processes and decisions. In Turkey and Hungary, where it is possible to preserve judicial independence, evidence indicates that it helps to speed up the democratic decline following the election of a populist leader (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

Another policy agenda is to enhance accountability in all government agencies. To challenge populist narratives about corruption among elites and institutional shortcomings, anti-corruption institutions and open budgeting and effective legislative monitoring are essential. Anti-system populism diminishes when democratic processes appear to be accountable and responsive. An improvement in audit institutions and maintenance of the independence of anti-corruption agencies can also help rebuild the public trust in governance structures, particularly in Brazil and Pakistan where public trust is eroded by corruption, which leads to populist mobilisation.

There is a need for immediate policy attention towards media freedom and information integrity. With misinformation, polarisation, and media capture worsening public discourse, so too do populist movements. Governments and regulators need to protect the freedom of the media and transparent ownership of media. Enhancing governance of digital platforms is crucial to fight disinformation and ensure freedom of speech. Citizens can critically analyse political information through public awareness campaigns and digital literacy programs, minimising deceptive populist narratives.

The socioeconomic roots of populism need to be tackled by a long-term democratic stability. There is a potential to alleviate populist frustration and anger through policies that address inequalities and create employment and inclusive economic development. But according to the comparative studies, economic uncertainty and perceived marginalisation is a key driver of populist mobilisation

in Latin America and Asia (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Thus, a democratic governance for the emerging states must feature inclusive growth plans, targeted social protection programs and access to public services.

Democracy itself needs to be resilient and, lastly, civil society and political pluralism. Independent civil society organizations, intellectual institutions and grassroots movements safeguard democracy and keep governments to check. Enhance the legal and institutional environment to ensure civil society functions freely from political and administrative interference. Making political parties more democratic and representative will limit the number of opportunities given to populist movements to control political systems.

To deal with populism is to strengthen the institutional, economic and social bases of democracy, not to shut down populist actors. The strongest protection against populism's assault on democracy is a robust democratic system.

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