

# Populism : US Versus Them Approach

## Outline

### → Introduction

Populism is a political ideology which segregates states, societies, and individual on various frivolous grounds. Therefore, it downturns democracy, economy and administration at large. The world needs to adopt cooperation, collaboration, consensus and participation-oriented policies for containing it.

### → Populism : Basic Tenets of Ideology

### → Populism propagates US versus Them Approach

- By Populism in Politics
- By demonization of political opponents
- By downturning Parliamentary norms and values
- By governing through authoritarian style

- By Disrupting Democratic Essentials
  - By Making Exclusive Economic Policies
  - By centralisation of decision-making process
  - By prompting Disinformation and Fake News
  - By Exclusive Governing Structure
  - By Taking Extreme and hypernationalist views
  - By Fueling Social Polarisation
  - By calling Savior-led reforms rather Consensus & Dialogue
- How does Populism-led US versus Them Approach affect States, Society and Individual?

→ Makes political Turmoil and instability

→ Affects Economic growth and development

→ Instigates Social exclusion and decreases Social mobility



→ Consumes States' Energy  
against self-perceived Enemies

→ What measures are needed to  
Contain Populism

→ States need Engagement,  
Collaboration on key issues

→ Countries should give space  
to opponents in politics

→ Governments adopt democratic  
principles and norms

→ Participatory, Consensus and  
inclusive institutions

→ International Governmental  
Organizations like the UN should  
promote Dialogue

→ Conclusion



Populism is a political ideology which propagates fissures and divisions between states, societies and individuals at large. It is starkly evident from the rise of populist leaders who are marginalizing political opponents on frivolous grounds, sidelining parliamentary and democratic norms and values, and adopting authoritarian form of government. Populism wave has engulfed the world including the United States, Brazil, Hungary, Turkey, Pakistan, India, Belarus, and Philippines. Although in recent elections particularly in the US, Brazil and Philippines, populism is reeling, yet the seeds it had sowed would last much longer in the society. It affects politics, economy and development. However, both the states and individuals need to adopt democratic principles to contain it. The United Nations should promote dialogue, consensus, and participatory political and economic policies in order to counter the menace of populism.



Populism is not a recent political notion in the history of nations-states. However, it has gained uptick in recent years even in the matured democratic structure. There are certain fundamental principles of populism on which anyone can guess its venom. It includes hypernationalistic tendencies among leaders, disengagement from world cooperation, radicalized mindset, seeking homogenous culture, purifying societies from other nations, etc.

According to Ece Temelkuran's book How to Lose a Country: The 7 Steps from Democracy to Dictatorship, populist leaders try to form their political clout by dividing nations between 'real people' and 'others'. This division is based on political loyalty. The author analyzed the Turkish politics as a model to give understanding about populism.

Even Populism in



less the highest attained form was present in Germany and Italy during the World War II where Hitler and Mussolini promoted Nazism and Fascism in extreme form, respectively. Media was under control where truth was diluted with bunch of lies. Such action creates truth and lie in one form where propaganda machine of political leaders takes ground. As Noam Chomsky in his book 'How the world works', explained that propaganda machine works in an environment where right and wrong is mixed.

Populism propagates the policy of political polarisation. The nation is divided on the basis of political loyalties that creates divisions among political supports. Even if a populist leader wins, he blames opponents for not letting him to fulfill his dream of centralisation of power. Polarisation in politics can be observed in the



political campaigns of populist leaders. For example Trump took 'Make America Great Again', Brazilian former President Bolsonaro, "Brazil is only for Brazilian", Modi in India, 'Sangh Privar ideology of purification', etc.

Only their political party has power to solve all the problems of the country by excluding others is a step towards political polarisation.

Moreover, political polarisation can be witnessed in the actions of populist leaders. They marginalize their opponents on petty grounds and convince public that it is necessary to purify the state from 'black sheeps'. In Bangladesh; the premier Hasina Wajid has sidelined political opponent Khalida Zia. Opposition face corruption charges, arrests, jail sentences in order to sideline them from the political chessboard. Such purification of nation is evident in closely divided nation of the UK in Brexit.



On addition, demonization of political opponents is clearly visible in defying the parliamentarian norms and values by populist leaders. Such approach further deepens the society. Usually parliamentary norms are like giving political space to opponents, consensus on key political and economic issues and accept the input of opposition for better comprehensive policy. However, populist leaders downturn these norms and values.

For instance Tayyab Erdogan in Turkey changed parliamentary system to presidential system in order to centralise power thereby increase clampdown against opposition.

Such authoritarian style of government completely sidelines opponents. Sometimes, the party supersedes the national interest. Any kind of criticism and censure is taken as an attack on ideology and the nation at large.

Furthermore, authoritarian style of government undermines the democratic essentials like consensus,



dialogue and participation. As George Orwell in his book outlined the structure of populist, authoritarian and totalitarian style of government where the populist leaders are up for opponents every time. Such actions prompt undemocratic culture where individual liberty and freedom remains at stake.

For example in Pakistan during the tenure of former prime minister Imran Khan who didn't allow the opposition leader to become the Chairman of Public Accounts Committee for two years.

This was a democratic norm in the country.

While disrupting the democratic norms, the populism promotes exclusive economic policies where non-consensus and non-participatory policies on key issues are formulated.

As discussed earlier, populism emboldens segregation on the basis of political loyalty, such approach is extended in economic field. The practical manifestation of exclusive



economic policy is Protectionism.

For instance Trump, the former president of the US, adopted protectionism while taking office in the White House. He sanctioned Chinese exports, re-signed US-Canada-Mexico deal, disengaged from the United Nations agencies, etc. He routinely disrupt the function of Congress which was about to disapprove his immigration policy.

Also, the exclusive economic policies by populist leaders can be extended in centralisation of governing structure. Populism in its various forms approach waters fertile ground where all the decision-making power is in the hand of one person. Proponents of this ideology argue that centralisation of power exceeds the execution of any policy. It is flawed argument. Because comprehensive development can only be made through consensus and all-inclusive decision making. Some political experts blame the exclusive political and economic



policies by the West Pakistan generated alienation feeling among the East Pakistanis. Therefore, it decided to separate itself from the rest of the country. (Source: Constitutional and Political History of Pak by Hamid Khan).

Meanwhile, the exclusive model of governance also grows the sense of polarisation at social level where targeted development is materialised. Only those bills and laws are passed by the governments which can pay political dividends for them in future. Social exclusion at educational level is happened. Populism divides the society on every ground. Furthermore, fake news and disinformation are propagated ferociously. January 6, 2021 in the US and January 8, 2022 in Brazil are clear evidence of how populism reacts whenever it is countered by democratic forces. Trump tweeted to storm the Congress on January 6, 2021 against President Joe Biden whose was about to take office.



Similarly, Trump of tropics - Bolsonaro's followers attacked the Supreme Court, Congress and other public buildings on 8<sup>th</sup> January, 2022. They don't easily recede from the politics as some believe.

The effects of populism-led approach of division and fissures are far-reaching on politics and economy. To begin with, such kind of policies create intolerance, hate, extremism, polarisation, rigidity and hard-liner mindset in politics.

Exclusive and divided political policies generate protests, anger and desperation in population which would lead to political instability.

According to Arundhati Roy's book Azadi, clampdown on opponents, media and people would prompt protests that can lead to political turmoil.

As political stability is bounded up with economic stability, political turmoil would hamper economic



economic and social development. Short-term, exclusive, limited economic policies fuel division and inequality in the society. For example, Trump had white supremacists political base, Bolsonaro had catholic political vote, and in Turkey Tayyab has ultranationalist, middle class following. Such division can be seen in economic policies which further aggravate the gulf among people.

Moreover, exclusive political and economic institutions restrict social mobility of people on equal footing in a country. Social mobility is a measure of equal opportunities for all. In a divided house, restricted development limits the growth of people in all realm without discrimination. This further affects the state's economic development at large. Purifying the nation from the perceived enemies and defying the inclusion of opponents deepens the political turmoil and economic instability.



Populism exacerbates the national sentiments by excluding other people from the development agenda. Self-perceived enemies as Hitler called Jews, Modi called Muslims, Trump called Chinese consume the state's energy in a wrong way. The governments start passing those laws which exclude their opponents. Furthermore, they exploit the fault lines among different nations which leads to ethnic and linguistic based attacks. Rise of racism during Trump in the US, increase of ethnic, religious and linguistic-based attacks during Modi in India are the clear examples where populism leads to division of the society and fault lines are exploited for political purposes.

Nevertheless, states need collaboration, cooperation and engagement on key issues in order to counter the wave of populism which is about to ~~counter~~ divide nations and societies. At domestic



level states need to rebuild democratic essentials like consensus among key stakeholders. The President of the US, Joe Biden, put stressed on the importance of collaboration and cooperation against populism. Populist leaders make apartheid system where segregation between 'real people' and 'others' is promoted for political capital.

Barack Obama said the the governments need to believe in democracy more than ever before to counter the populist leaders. Parliament where all across the country is represented must be strengthen on democratic credentials so that all-encompassing and inclusive economic and political decisions can be made. Breathing space to opponents is a basic tenet for democracy to grow; and, free and independent media is the fundamental element for constructive policy making.



According to the author of book 'How Democracies Die', it is democratic norms and values which act as guardrails against unconstitutional encroachments. Politics is the name of possibilities (Bismarck). Countries need to believe in democracy to counter populism-led approach of division. Democracy Summit 2021 led by the US is a right step in this direction. Opposition is a part of politics which represents the minority in a state. It is as important as other ruling party. Even, it is the responsibility of the ruling party to generate space for political opponents.

Vibrant civil society and independent media are important to counter populist leaders policies. An independent and free media criticizes the government which makes it more comprehensive in policy-making. Moreover, there is a need to increase political participation of people.



It was observed that during the presidential election of the US, 2020, it was the turnout of people in voting for Joe Biden that made his victory in the race. Similarly, close-race between right-wing Bolsonaro and Left-wing Lula de Silva could change the equation if people didn't come out for vote against populism.

The world is under distress due to wreaking havoc global warming effects, poverty, inequality, economic downturn, Russian invasion in Ukraine, pandemics, etc. These are global problems. In order to tackle these issues collective efforts of the countries are needed. The governments need global efforts and collaboration against mounting problems that are challenging all the states in different aspect.

In a nutshell, populism led approach of division and



exclusion is creating ripples in every account. Political polarisation, democratic norms' disruption, and downturn of parliamentary values are the tenets of populism. It further divides the nations, states and societies by governing authoritarian way, clamping on media, marginalizing opposition, adopting exclusive economic policies and taking extreme and hypernational views on key issues. Such tendencies of political leaders lead to political turmoil and economic instability which prompt social exclusion and lessen social mobility. Therefore, states need collaboration, consensus, participation and dialogue at domestic and global level in order to contain populism led approach of division.