Introduction to special issue: The study of populism in international relations

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Abstract

The rise of nationalist populism, its challenge to representative democracy and the populist impact on the liberal international order have emerged as one of the most significant phenomena in international politics in recent years. This special issue brings together a group of researchers from a wide range of theoretical, disciplinary and epistemological backgrounds, including political science, populism studies, foreign policy analysis and critical security studies, to examine the international dimension of populism and the practical impact of populism on foreign policy and international security. Empirically and conceptually, it presents audiences in political science, international relations and related disciplines with a timely review of the scope of research on populism in international relations. Our specific aim is to explore and evaluate what challenges a populist mobilisation of anti-elitism and anti-globalism presents to both the contemporary study of international politics, and the structure of the international system and key actors within it.

Keywords

foreign policy, international relations, international security, political rhetoric, populism, voter mobilisation

The election of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States and the success of Brexit in the European Union (EU) referendum campaign in the United Kingdom in 2016 are two of the most prominent examples of a populist disruption of the status quo in international politics in recent years. Alternatively described as 'wave' (Aslanidis, 2016), 'surge' (Mudde, 2016) and 'explosion' (Judis, 2016), the global rise of populism and the prominence of populist leaders in government in the Global North and South – for example, Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil), Rodrigo Duterte (Philippines), Recep Erdoğan (Turkey), Alberto Fernández (Argentina), Boris Johnson (UK), Narendra Modi (India), Viktor Orbán (Hungary) and Donald Trump (USA) – has greatly increased academic interest in the international and transnational aspects of this populist phenomenon, and how populists in power impact individual foreign policy outcomes, as well as the interaction of populism with globalisation and the structure of the liberal international order at large (Chryssogelos, 2017; Plagemann and Destradi, 2019; Verbeek and Zaslove, 2017; Wajner, 2020).

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In considering the relationship between populism and foreign policy, the analytical focus shifts on how the basic antagonism of the 'people' versus the 'elite' becomes projected onto the international sphere, targeting those policies, ideologies, institutions, and organisations whose inherent multilateralism and internationalism populist anti-globalists reject in the name of reclaiming national sovereignty and popular authority (Jenne, 2021; Wojczewski, 2019). Globalisation and the structural transformation of states in the international system in terms of their reduced capacity for socio-economic regulation and subsequent adaptation to trans- and supranational forms of governance and policy legitimation, such as the EU, have significantly affected the domestic relationship between elites and the people (Chryssogelos, 2020; Krastev, 2017). This erosion of national sovereignty is engendering 'tensions in the relationship between official power and political community' (Chryssogelos, 2020: 23) that lie at the heart of the populist mobilisation of popular discontent and anti-establishment resentment. Demands for the renationalisation of policies by populist voters and politicians range from border security and immigration control to trade protectionism and reforming or ending national membership in international organisations and free trade agreements.[1]

Exploring the international, transnational and global dimensions of the populist phenomenon has thereby significantly widened the scope of populism research, where scholars were traditionally more concerned with the domestic sphere, putting a particular emphasis on issues of voter mobilisation (Jansen, 2011; Roberts, 2015), the populist content of political communication (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011) and the political and discursive significance of populist leaders (Hawkins, 2009; Weyland, 2001). Comparative perspectives, on the contrary, tended to focus on populist movements and political party systems in Latin America and Europe especially (de la Torre, 2015; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012b), but did not particularly consider wider global interactions, foreign policy or the realm of international security.

The growing literature on populism in international relations (IR) has in turn prioritised populism's role in informing the foreign policy decision-making processes of populist leaders and parties (Jenne, 2021; Lacatus and Meibauer, 2020; Wehner and Thies, 2020; Özdamar and Ceydilek, 2020) and how populist rhetoric, beliefs and performances interact with security discourses and practices. Here, social constructions of enmity, existential threat and crisis, and discursive processes of internal and external Othering (Wojczewski, 2020), the populist securitisation of policy issues such as trade and immigration (Fermor and Holland, 2020), the centrality of securitisation to populism's performative style, aesthetics and rhetoric (Kurylo, 2020), as well as the mobilisation of narratives of ontological (in)security (Steele and Homolar, 2019) against so-called 'enemies of the people' are especially noteworthy. Populist discourses like 'America First' and 'Take Back Control' construct their respective security imaginaries of socio-economic threat, political alienation and socio-cultural anxiety decidedly as non-elitist articulation of the ordinary fears and concerns of the 'real people' (Beeman, 2018; Freeden, 2017; Malik, 2018). In identifying establishment failure and linking the existence of a corrupt elite to wider socio-economic and socio-cultural anxieties and insecurities, populist performances and discourses simultaneously emphasise dramatisation, personalisation, emotionalisation, and conflict in their antagonistic framing of policy issues and representation of international politics (Moffitt, 2016; Wodak, 2015).

Populists fundamentally legitimate their claim to power and authority by claiming to speak for the forgotten people who have lost faith in mainstream politics, unaccountable elites, technocratic governance, dysfunctional institutions and discredited 'globalist'

policies and ideologies, from cosmopolitanism to European integration and multilateralism that are threatening them both on a material level, and in disrupting their own sense of identity and national belonging. Populism thereby appears both as popular response by particular voter segments to a perceived crisis of legitimacy of liberal democracy, which leaves them disillusioned, emotionally adrift and disappointed (Mair, 2013), and as mode of political persuasion deliberately employed by political entrepreneurs to reinforce popular sentiments of political dysfunction, existential crisis, national decline and systemic failure.

Nationalist populists in power ranging from Donald Trump to Viktor Orbán and Jair Bolsonaro have raised the spectre of democratic erosion towards far-right authoritarianism and even fascism (Mudde, 2019; Stanley, 2018). Jan-Werner Müller (2017) and a majority of populism scholars cite the eradication of heterogeneity and pronounced hostility towards pluralism in populism's articulation of a homogenised 'will of the people' as inherently anti-liberal and existential threat to the functioning of liberal democracy as populists in power erode institutional constraints and the protection of civil liberties and minority rights. Based on a comparative cross-regional study of populism's impact on democracy, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012a) have argued that populism can have positive attributes for consolidating or deepening democracy as an oppositional force, for example, through increasing political participation and including marginalised groups and their demands and interests into the political process. Such democratic gains, however, were ultimately coming at the expense of liberal features, such as institutional independence of the judiciary once populists are in power, resulting in the erosion of checks and balances and the concentration of executive power (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012a). Translated onto the international sphere, the impact of nationalist, right-wing or authoritarian populism is analogously identified as threat to the existence of a rules-based liberal international order and the functioning of key institutions and organisations, from continued EU integration to the survival of NATO, potentially signalling a return of great power politics in the 21st century marked by competing spheres of influence (Boyle, 2016; Schrank, 2017).

Post-Marxist political theorists like Ernesto Laclau (2005) and Chantal Mouffe (2018), on the contrary, award left-wing populism and associated groups such as the Spanish Podemos or Syriza in Greece a positive, emancipatory-progressive quality for highlighting genuine socio-political and socio-economic grievances in society and responding to the crisis of legitimacy of contemporary liberal democracy. Left-wing or progressive populism is seen here as necessary democratic counter to a neoliberal centrist consensus and the depoliticisation and disempowerment of societies through technocratic transnational governance. In the words of Giorgos Katsambekis (2020: 16), 'populist actors of the left envisage "the people" in a distinct way, asserting inclusion rather than exclusion, advocating an egalitarian vision of society, fighting inequalities and opposing strict hierarchies'. This inclusive conceptualisation of the 'people' also opens up the possibility for a progressive transnational populism, for example, in the construction of a pan-European popular community that transcends national identities and constitutes a European *demos* acting as democratic corrective to the technocratic governance model of the EU (Panayotu, 2017). Populism and its articulation by the populist radical right is therefore viewed as existential threat to liberal democracy (Galston, 2018; Mudde, 2019), while, on the contrary, populism is also characterised as a necessary reform mechanism that can reinvigorate the democratic process through (re)integrating politically alienated or economically underprivileged segments of the population, giving rise to popular demands for more democratic input in government and supporting greater plurality in political party systems (Ellenbroek et al., 2021; Mouffe, 2018; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012b). What unites

these competing perspectives, however, is that they both characterise populism as relatively flexible political mode and communicative logic that can adapt to the particularities of different national contexts and specific grievances, anxieties and resentments in the name of reclaiming national sovereignty and popular representation.

This special issue builds and expands on this extant research in IR, critical security studies (CSS) and populism studies by engaging with the discursive, strategic and performative aspects of contemporary populism, centring its analysis on the global, transnational and international dimensions of the populist phenomenon. The various contributions of this special issue explore how the social construction of a fundamentally hostile external environment and an antagonistic identity politics interlinking both the domestic and international sphere informs populist rhetoric, electoral strategies of voter mobilisation, and the (re)making of foreign and security policies. In particular, the special issue seeks to explore how populist actors derive political legitimacy and achieve policy impact from constructing a hostile imagination of world politics in which populists claim to protect the 'real people' against the political, economic and ideological Otherness of elites, the corrupting influence of their global interactions and the national manifestations of crisis and insecurity that their discredited policy programmes have supposedly brought about in the present.

The individual contributions collected in this special issue therefore provide a comprehensive overview of the study of populism in IR while engaging a wide range of theoretical, methodological and epistemological perspectives in exploring the variegated manifestations of populism in world politics and the significance of populist-informed foreign and security policies. While populism has proved notoriously difficult to define, with some authors characterising it as an inherently contested or fragmented concept (Laclau, 2005; Taggart, 2000), the literature in populism studies has recently sought to provide greater conceptual clarity, identifying three main analytical approaches, designated as ideational (Mudde, 2017), political-strategic (Weyland, 2017) and socio-cultural (Ostiguy, 2017), respectively. According to the influential definition by Cas Mudde (2017), which has found widespread acceptance by scholars following ideational and discursive approaches, populism constitutes a 'thin ideology' that considers society to be separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' and the 'the corrupt elite', demanding that politics operates exclusively as an expression of the *volonté générale* of the former. The political-strategic approach instead focuses on the mobilisation strategies by populist leaders and self-identified establishment 'outsiders', who claim power in the name of the people, targeting voters by translating popular grievances and anti-establishment resentment into contentious political action (Weyland, 2017). The socio-cultural approach adopts a broader view, treating populism as transgressive political style and media performance that disrupts conventional notions of 'high politics' and elite norms of political behaviour and public communication. Displays of bad manners and 'low politics' are designed to shock and disrupt the status quo while cementing the polarising appeal of populists with their distinctive audiences (Moffitt, 2016; Ostiguy, 2017). Ultimately, however, the boundaries between these approaches are relatively fluid and they all share an overriding emphasis on the significance of political rhetoric, communication, discourse and performative styles that revolve around an antagonistic core logic of politics.

For the authors collected in this special issue, a basic antagonism that is socially constructed and politically communicated between national sovereignty, popular authority and an established system of institutional and representational mechanisms and its elite

members therefore provides a common conceptual starting point to capture the international features of populism. Two contributions in this special issue focus in this context on the political rhetoric of populist leaders as key performers of populism and how their antagonistic framing of the international sphere and foreign policy issues interlink with their domestic popular appeal. Daniel F. Wajner examines the transnational patterns in this performative dynamic. Wajner argues that contemporary populist governments show a growing willingness to transfer the discursive construction of an antagonistic relationship between the 'people' and the 'elites' to the regional and global spheres as a way of legitimising themselves internally and externally. According to Wajner, a transnational legitimation strategy satisfies various psychological, institutional and political needs of contemporary populist leaders, as it helps them to reach, attract and politically activate both national and international sympathisers. This populist quest for international legitimisation is illustrated via a comparative analysis of cases in Europe, the Americas, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Corina Lacatus and Gustav Meibauer in turn explore the interlinkage of populist rhetoric and popular appeal by right-wing populist leaders, focusing in particular on how populist claims to authenticity and leaders' embrace of 'truthiness' interlink with a nationalist populist policy agenda. A qualitative content analysis of the electoral speeches of Boris Johnson and Donald Trump is used here to examine how these key populist figures attempted to communicate 'authentically' to their respective audiences, reinforcing their populist brand via their hostile (re)imagination of international politics as zero-sum arena of confrontation and persistent struggle against alien Others. Where Gramsci (1975) saw the role of 'organic intellectuals' in the role of a societal vanguard to challenge common sense and ultimately change a reigning capitalist hegemony, nationalist populists like Trump and Johnson seem to operate more akin to organic anti-intellectuals whose permanent communicative and behavioural transgressions serve to undermine established liberal democratic norms and the political status quo in order to advance their personal aggrandisement and consolidation of power.

Understanding the ideational and material factors that have contributed to the global rise of populism and assessing its political consequences thereby also require a critical analysis of the practical cooperation and shared worldviews uniting different populist leaders, parties and movements (Stengel et al., 2019), and the operational and ideological significance of a global 'populist international' (Applebaum, 2016). In examining the shared ideological underpinnings of the contemporary global wave of nationalist populism, Jelena Subotic's contribution to this special issue explores the enduring role of antisemitism in forging such ideational connections via the identification of a common enemy. While positing that antisemitism has historically provided an ideational foundation for a plethora of different nationalist and populist movements, Subotic focuses on contemporary manifestations of transnational antisemitism in populist movements in Europe and the United States to demonstrate the role their international connections and mutually reinforcing ideological platforms play in the development and maintenance of a global 'populist international'. As Subotic argues, the strategic use of antisemitism in far-right populist foreign policy discourse has thereby undergone a significant transformation, as evidenced in the increasing decoupling of attitudes towards Israel from antisemitism against diaspora Jews and a rise in pro-Israel policies among far-right antisemitic parties and movements.

A comprehensive examination of the role of populism in IR thereby also demands an analytical focus and empirical scope beyond the story of populism in the 'West' to capture its wider transnational and geopolitical manifestations. In their contribution to this special

issue, Sandra Destradi, Johannes Plagemann and Hakkı Taş accordingly shift attention from a prevalent focus on European politics and the Global North towards populist dynamics in the Global South. A theoretical framework linking literatures on populism and politicisation is applied to a comparative study of Turkey and India, two prominent examples of populist governments, which have endorsed nationalist religious ideologies in legitimating their claim to political power and authority. Based on a systematic analysis of party programmes, official speeches and social media data, Destradi, Plagemann and Taş demonstrate when and how populist leaders politicise both regional-level and global-level foreign policy issues, and to what effects. Their analysis of the public statements by Erdoğan and Modi shows that these two nationalist populist leaders emphasised different dimensions of populism in their rhetoric and that this corresponded to a variation in the politicisation of foreign policy in both scope and content.

A more carefully calibrated understanding of populism in IR, at the same time, also necessitates a more nuanced understanding of the conceptual differences and similarities in the international outlook of left-wing and right-wing populists, as well as the respective homogeneity or heterogeneity within and across these groupings. Ernesto Laclau (2005) characterised the relative 'vagueness and imprecision' of populism as 'essential component' of its discursive operation, given the necessity to subsume a heterogeneous and fluctuating social reality of competing political claims and antagonistic relationships under a homogeneous identification of the 'people' flexible enough to both encompass and transcend these tensions and to constitute a common political identity to which all those who were intended to be included could subscribe by projecting their hopes and aspirations into populism's 'empty signifier'. This projection manifests, for example, in the figure of the populist leader as personification of the 'will of the people' (Laclau, 2005: 118). Whether in its nationalist or progressive forms, however, the representational and performative features of populism are constituted as an antagonistic, counter-hegemonic discourse (Mouffe, 2005: 71–77), a social identification as mode of resistance that is meant to challenge a reigning political and socio-cultural elite and its claims to authority and legitimacy. In the words of Yannis Stavrakakis, populism constitutes the articulation of social practices into political identities, which seek to build new hegemonies (Stavrakakis, 2017). In her contribution to this special issue, Soraya Hamdaoui thereby explores how political elites in France have responded to such a populist challenge of the establishment by focusing on the anti-populist strategy of *La République en marche!* (LREM) during the Yellow Vest (*Gilets Jaunes*) protests and comparing it with the political reaction against *Rassemblement National* (RN), the former *Front National* (FN), France's main nationalist populist party. Hamdaoui argues that while the political establishment of LREM ostracised and demonised the RN to contain its political progression, their reaction to the populist Yellow Vest movement was far more balanced and cautious. The article distinguishes two types of anti-populism, an adversarial one in opposition to a nationalist populist party and an accommodative one taken in response to a populist social movement. According to Hamdaoui, mainstream parties can respond to 'street populism' with an accommodative anti-populism that is less binary and allows more political proximity with the populist challengers, while elites' distrust towards the people as xenophobic, hostile and politically inferior nonetheless remains visible.

Following post-structuralist inspired work on nationalism and populism (Katsambekis and Stavrakakis, 2017), the phenomenon of nationalist populism can generally be conceptualised as discursive linkage with populism centred on the signifier of 'the people' and separating society alongside an up/down axis between the 'pure people' and the

'corrupt elite' (Laclau, 2005; Mudde, 2004), while nationalism is centred on the signifier of the nation, constructing a political antagonism through the division of an Inside and Outside, resulting in nationalist populist discourses attributing blame both 'above' and 'below' and 'outside' (Anastasiou, 2019; De Cleen and Stavrakakis, 2017). Nationalist populism, alternatively referred to in the literature as authoritarian populism (Norris and Ingelhart, 2019), right-wing populism (Wodak, 2015), and radical right populism (Mudde, 2019), constructs an idealised, homogeneous popular community as only legitimate carrier of political sovereignty, defined as the 'hard-working, God-fearing, patriotic citizens' (Kazin, 1998: 288) and in particular idealising the White working-class inhabitants of the rural 'heartland' (Taggart, 2000), which are elevated over the corrupt and cosmopolitan urban elites, as well as underserving Others, in particular immigrants and minorities. The 'pure people' (Mudde, 2004) are the foundation of the community; they have been robbed of their rightful political, socio-cultural and economic primacy and they must be restored to their proper place and society regenerated (Mény and Surel, 2001). Right-wing populism designates a nativist–nationalist conceptualisation of the people as ethno-cultural *gemeinschaft*, an exclusive national community of shared origin and destiny, both separated against the nefarious elites 'above' as those unwanted outsiders from 'below' and 'outside' to which the blame for the decline of the nation and the loss of status of the in-group is attributed (Golec de Zavala and Keenan, 2021). This results in the amalgamation of national and popular sovereignty in nationalist populist discourse, where the popular community of the 'real people' is elevated to the status of sole relevant carrier of political authority and national identity; through the mechanisms of blame attribution, Othering, emotionalisation and collective narcissism, empowerment of the people becomes synonymous with the restoration of the nation. Nationalism, xenophobia and nativism thus provide common ideational foundations and discursive tropes employed in the political rhetoric, electoral mobilisation strategies and policy legitimation of right-wing populists. Populist appeals to nostalgic nationalism and collective narcissism are thereby frequently gendered as return to an idealised patriarchal space in time in which White heterosexual men enjoyed a dominant position of cultural hegemony in politics, business, and society, unchallenged by women, ethnic minorities or alternative sexual orientations and gender identities (Hakola et al., 2021; Cichocka and Cislak, 2020). Hypermasculinity, appeals to White patriarchy, and a vulgar sexist machismo were, for example, all signifying markers of Donald Trump's populist style and rhetorical repertoire that actively contributed to his popular appeal with his followers (Neville-Shephard and Neville-Shephard, 2020).

Finally, in exploring the various discursive and practical interactions between populism, foreign policy and security, scholarship in IR and CSS has increasingly explored interdisciplinary avenues beyond an exchange with populism studies, incorporating insights from disciplines such as political communication and political psychology, for example, in exploring the role of affective appeals in populist security narratives and how populist demands for the restoration of national sovereignty target popular anxieties surrounding the societal, cultural and economic impacts of globalisation, mass immigration and structural demographic shifts (Browning, 2019; Holland and Fermor, 2021; Homolar and Löfflmann, 2021). This includes research into the mobilising dynamics and policy legitimation effects of affective appeals to nostalgic nationalism and the deliberate humiliation of the 'real people' populating the 'heartland' by a hostile establishment, popular anxieties about social marginalisation and demographic displacement, and fear of alien Others, in particular unauthorised migrants that are framed predominantly as violent

criminals and terrorists in nationalist populist rhetoric (Hochschild, 2018; Jardina, 2019; Norris and Ingelhart, 2019; Oliver and Rahn, 2016; Wuthnow, 2019). Populist humiliation narratives reinforce a profound sense of ontological insecurity among nationalist populist voters that can culminate in the legitimation of politically motivated violence against an establishment represented as fundamentally hostile to the 'will of the people' (Homolar and Löfflmann, 2021). Violence becomes justified as deliberate act of resistance against perceived injustices and the victimisation of the popular community by villainous elites. The violent potential of such populist mobilisation strategies was underlined by the Capitol riot in the United States on 6 January 2021, where a violent mob of Trump supporters sought to overturn the certification of the 2020 presidential election, an election which Donald Trump had repeatedly and systematically reassured his followers had been 'stolen' from them by the corrupt Washington establishment (Homolar and Löfflmann, 2021). The study of traditional conceptualisations of national security in IR, however, focuses predominantly on the material realm of geopolitics, military power and grand strategy, largely ignoring questions of collective identity and domestic politics. In examining the conceptual relationship between populism and security and its practical manifestations, CSS scholarship, on the contrary, offers multiple points of connection as the field has turned its attention increasingly to non-elitist perspectives and everyday experiences of (in)security, the vernacular of ordinary people, and concepts of ontological security in the social construction of identity (Gillespie and O'Loughlin, 2009; Steele and Homolar, 2019; Stevens and Vaughan-Williams, 2018). In their work on vernacular security, for example, Jarvis and Lister have pointed to the significance of a 'bottom-up' view of security, which exists in opposition to elite articulations that 'speak for, rather than to (or, perhaps better, with) "ordinary" people and the conditions of (in)security they experience, encounter or construct in everyday life' (Jarvis and Lister, 2013: 158, see also Wojczewski, 2020). The research by Bonansinga, Kinnvall and Svensson, and Löfflmann in this special issue accordingly centres on how the security imaginaries of different populist leaders, parties and movements play a vital role in structuring their public performance and political operation.

Populist security imaginaries correspond with existing avenues of inquiry while at the same time occupying a conceptual space between the categories of 'official/elite' discourse and 'popular/non-elite knowledge' (Stevens and Vaughan-Williams, 2018: 16) employed in CSS, thereby prompting a further conceptual, analytical, and methodological development in the study of the social construction of security. Securitisation theory, for example, examines the rhetorical construction and political performance of elite speech acts and their respective audience reception (Booth, 2007; Buzan et al., 1998). The conceptual space occupied by populist 'outsiders', who reject conventional norms of political behaviour and communication, however, sits somewhat awkwardly with securitisation theory's analytical model of discursive authority and legitimacy. Populist 'interventions' (Panizza, 2017: 415) aim to redraw the boundaries of political debate and public discourse by redefining what is sayable and doable, and hence socially acceptable and politically possible, reformulating the hegemonic political framework of meaning-making and identity formation through a decidedly anti-elitist discursive performance of ordinariness and authenticity designed to shock and disrupt the status quo. While the impact of populism in traditional security areas such as counter-terrorism policy (Hall, 2020) and grand strategy and national security (Löfflmann, 2019) has begun to draw more scholarly attention, in particular in the US context, some CSS scholars have applied securitisation theory to the speech acts, political rhetoric and aesthetics used by nationalist populist leaders like Donald Trump, further developing securitisation approaches by applying a

more carefully calibrated understanding of the role of audience interaction and the interplay of national and popular sovereignty in the construction of the Self in populist security discourses and narratives (Fermor and Holland, 2020; Kurylo, 2020; Wojczewski, 2020). Examining the interplay of populism and security, Donatella Bonansinga thereby contends that in the narrative construction of threat, left-wing populists engage in processes of securitisation that are comparable with the discursive practices of the populist right. Empirically, Bonansinga bases her argument on a qualitative content analysis of key texts of the well-known French leftist populist Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his party *La France Insoumise*, highlighting how left-wing populism challenges the existing security order on multiple levels by interlinking both national elites and international bodies such as the EU and NATO as sources of popular insecurity. As Bonansinga demonstrates, populists across the political spectrum can use insecurity as an ideational resource to construct the 'people vs elite' struggle as a relationship whereby the existence of the former is threatened by the latter in a variety of ways. This questions the supposed primacy of socio-economic arguments within left-wing populism.

Going beyond securitisation theory, two contributions in this special issue approach the study of populism predominantly from the perspective of ontological security and affective appeals to fear, anxiety and resentment. Discursive and narrative approaches in IR and ontological security studies have conceptualised emotions as affective energies and dynamics that can be analysed textually as specific content of political communication (Koschut et al., 2017; Ross, 2006). The study of discourse thereby includes both the intertextuality and contextualisation of emotions on a macro-societal level and their co-constitution among different producers and audiences as politically, socially and culturally relevant. The affective terms of political communication, that is, direct references to feelings such as pride, joy, fear or hate, and 'emotional connotations' frame political actors or policy issues in a distinctively positive or negative light, for example, in referring to 'failed policies' or 'endless wars' in populist rhetoric (Koschut et al., 2017: 483–484). Catarina Kinnvall and Ted Svensson turn their attention here to voter mobilisation by the populist far right. Incorporating insights from political psychology, Kinnvall and Svensson identify the conceptual interlinkage of internal and external insecurities as hallmark of nationalist populist actors, while they are primarily interested in the psychological and affective mechanisms underwriting this process, considering populism predominantly as source of anxiety that manifests both transnationally and in the everyday. Their analysis of the ontological insecurity, fantasy narratives and emotional governance of far-right populism is in particular centred on gendered and racialised narratives and how these are fuelled by feelings of pride, shame, vulnerability and insecurity. Georg Löfflmann's analysis, on the contrary, focuses on the interlinkage of voter mobilisation and policy legitimation in the populist security narratives employed by Donald Trump and his nationalist populist vision of 'America First'. Löfflmann argues that 'America First' served a dual role of internal and external Othering, which elevated the internal Other, the 'enemy of the American people' to an ontological status of equal or even superior standing to that of external threats to national security. Trump's populist security narratives simultaneously reframed the concept of the American Self around the particular insecurities and anxieties of his core supporters of White working-class and non-college-educated voters in the American heartland, legitimising an anti-globalist policy agenda that actively sought to divide domestic audiences for political gain.

As this introduction suggests, populism's discursive fluidity and relative flexibility requires researchers to closely examine how any particular identity of the 'people' and the 'elite' is socially constructed and politically defined. Populist politicians, parties

and movements and their varying definitions of popular community, national sovereignty and insecurity operate through discursive and practical means that manifest both domestically and internationally and they interlink both spheres in their appeals to voters and particular constituencies by imagining a hostile Other. Conceptually, this special issue makes a strong case for incorporating insights from populism studies, political communication, political psychology and adjacent field in political science in exploring how populist communication, voter mobilisation and policy performances reframe the international as source of profound insecurity, existential crisis and threat, and how this identification simultaneously serves to forge a close ideational and affective connection between populists and their constituencies in the context of domestic politics. Empirically, the analysis of populism in IR contained in this special issue covers a wide empirical and geographic spectrum, from the international and transnational framing of populist discourses and common ideational and ideological resources, to the use of specific national strategies and populist narratives to legitimate individual foreign policy choices, ranging from militarised border security and immigration restrictions to trade protectionism and strategic geopolitical realignments. The authors collected here explore some of the most significant populist disruptions of the international status quo in recent times, including the presidency of Donald Trump in the United States, Brexit and the premiership of Boris Johnson and the global rise of nationalist populist governments located on the far-right, ranging from India and Turkey to Hungary and Brazil. They offer a variety of analytical frameworks and empirical findings that provide a more comprehensive understanding of the different iterations of populism and its variegated political effects and international interactions. In presenting this research on the study of populism in IR, we hope to make transparent not only where and how various populisms connect, but crucially where populists differ and compete in their formulation of collective identities, the implementation of policy and their conceptualisation of the international sphere itself.

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Note

1. Empirically, the contributions in this special issue are mainly concerned with right-wing, authoritarian, or nationalist populism; its role in the international system and its study in international relations (IR). Where the basic term 'populism' is used, it refers to an antagonistic discourse that separates society between the 'real people' and the 'corrupt elite'. The more specific populist articulations and constructions of the popular community and the various categories of 'enemies of the people' they apply will be designated as 'nationalist populism'/'right-wing populism' and 'left-wing populism'/'progressive populism,' respectively, in this introduction.

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