

# INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY (INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORIES)

## POPULISM

10th lesson

EFOP-3.6.2-16-2017-00007

**SZÉCHENYI** 



HUNGARIAN  
GOVERNMENT

European Union  
European Social  
Fund



INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE

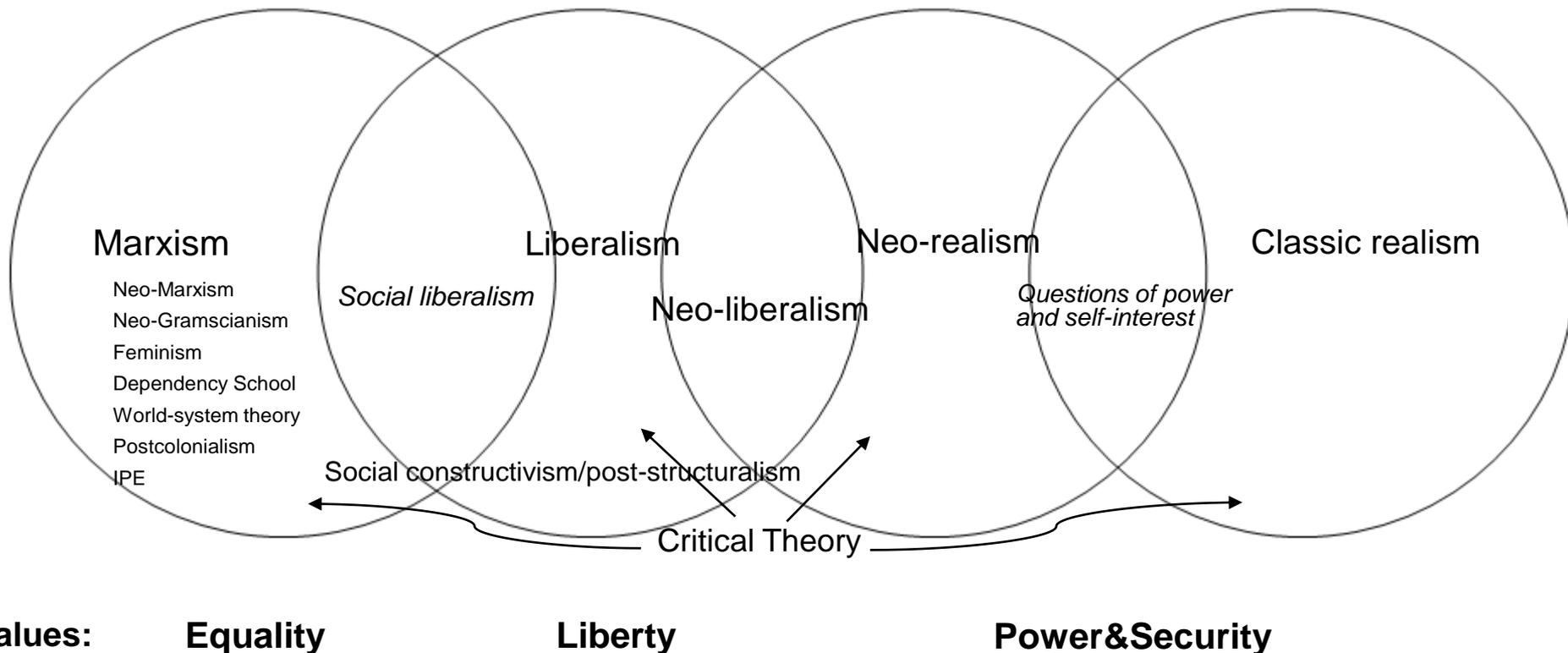
# LEARNING GUIDE

- Lesson length: **15** slides
- Content:
  - Introduction
  - Definition and types of populism
  - The origins
  - Thin and thick populism
  - Remember
- Recommended minimum duration for review: 40 minutes
- Suggested minimum time for learning: 1 hour and 10 minutes
- The learning of the curriculum is aided by a course book and self-assessment questions.
- Recommended minimum duration of this full lesson: 2 hours



# INTRODUCTION

We arrived to the end of key concepts in IR.  
Now let's talk about added values.



## DEFINITION AND TYPES OF POPULISM

- What is populism? Is it a theory in IR?
- Well, the question is how do you look to the concept.
- Since the nineties of 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is rather a political reality that gives a certain value to the existing theories. However, some scholars will claim that populism is indeed a theory.
- We will take a different approach.

# DEFINITION AND TYPES OF POPULISM

- It's important to feel yourself to be the people, to love, suffer, enjoy your pleasures like the people.

(Eva Perón)



- Populism is the label that political elites attach to policies supported by ordinary citizens that they don't like.

(Francis Fukuyama)



# DEFINITION AND TYPES OF POPULISM

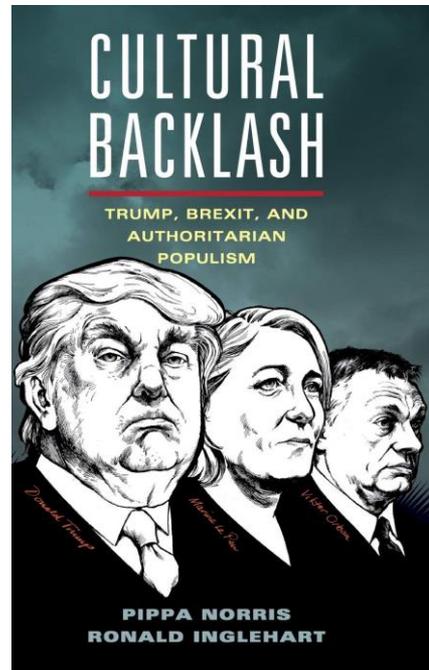
- Many times populism is attached to the far-right political spectrum.
- This claim is **wrong!**
- Basically, in countries where extreme-right parties flourish, discussion is focusing on whether extreme-right voters actually vote in favour of something – a party, a candidate, a programme, an issue – or only against something – the other parties, the system, the establishment.
- *In other words, is an extreme-right vote an ideological vote or just an expression of protest/discontent?*

# DEFINITION AND TYPES OF POPULISM: CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

- Scholars who analyzed the reasons of emergence of right-wing radicalism and populism in Eastern and Central Europe came to the conclusion that there can be distinguished several tendencies which were developed by the contradictions in transformation on macro level since the time of political transition. *These tendencies are Europism, re-nationalization and globalization.*
- According to many, *populism is not political content but political style.*

# DEFINITION AND TYPES OF POPULISM

- The populist politicians are trying to portray the politics simplified, and they mobilize fears, aversions and other negative emotions to reach their goals.



# DEFINITION AND TYPES OF POPULISM: CLASSIC CONCEPT

- Margaret Canovan:
- *'Populism in modern democratic societies is best seen as an appeal to 'the people' against both the established structure of power and dominant ideas and values of the society' (Canovan 1999, 3)*
- This is the classic concept.

# THE ORIGINS

- Highlighting the most documented cases throughout history, we can distinguish three successive waves of populism:
  - Agrarian populism: to be found in the Russian intellectual Narodniki in the second half of the nineteenth century, engaging in an egalitarianist struggle on behalf of Russian peasants. Also in the U.S., the American People's Party, which pleaded against capitalism and in favour of agrarian socio-economic interests around end of 1800s, beginning of 1900s.
  - Latin American populism: the Latin American variant of populism prospered in the 1940s and 1950s with the authoritarian regimes of Juan Péron in Argentina and Getúlio Vargas in Brazil. Key elements: nationalist, charismatic leaders pretended to be a direct emanation of the people and to govern for the people against established interests.
  - New-right populism: mobilises, from the 1970s onwards, against traditional politics, which is reproached as being self-serving while systematically ignoring the real wishes of the people. New-right populism typically focuses on issues such as immigration, taxes, crime and nationalism.

# THIN AND THICK POPULISM

- It is possible, to distinguish a ‘thin’ and a ‘thick’ concept of populism.
  - Thin: considering it as a political communication style of political actors that refers to the people.
  - Thick: refers to the people, anti-establishment ideas, excludes certain population categories.
- We will use the thin definition, only relying on reference to the people, as an operational definition.
- The thick definition comes close to the classic (Canovan’s) concept.

## Populism = communication frame

- These political actors can be politicians and political parties, but also movement leaders, interest group representatives and journalists.
- Populism, therefore, is a communication frame that appeals to and identifies with the people, and pretends to speak in their name (Taggart 2000; Canovan 1981).
- It is a master frame, a way to wrap up all kinds of issues.
- Note, in this sense Gandhi, for instance, was also a populist.

# THIN POPULISM

- But this style has a content:
  - ‘(the) people’,
  - ‘(the) public’,
  - ‘(the) citizen(s)’,
  - ‘(the) voter(s)’,
  - ‘(the) taxpayer(s)’,
  - ‘(the) resident(s)’,
  - ‘(the) consumer(s)’,
  - ‘(the) population’, etc.
  
- ‘I listen to you because I talk about you.’

# THIN POPULISM

- In its thin conceptualisation, populism is totally stripped from all pejorative and authoritarian connotations.
- *Populism, thinly defined, has no political colour, it is colourless and can be of the left and of the right.*
- It is a **normal** political style adopted by all kinds of politicians from all times.
- Populism is simply a strategy to mobilise support, it is a standard communication technique to reach out to the constituency.

# THICK POPULISM

- Although anti-establishmentness cannot be considered as an exclusive feature of populism – many radical political movements in general are driven by anti-elitist attitudes and nurture anti-elitist feelings – most populism scholars consider anti-elitism as a central feature of populism.
- Anti-elitist or anti-establishment discourse emphasises the distance and estrangement between the people and the elites.
- Who is the elite?
  - Political elites,
  - Media,
  - State,
  - Intellectuals,
  - Economic powers,
  - Whoever has a power that could mobilise the anti-elitist feelings.

# THICK POPULISM

- According to thick populism, the people largely share the same interests and have the same features. Yet, some isolated groups clearly do not share the people's 'good' characteristics.
- This enemy is not above, but internal, within the people.
- Some specific population segments are stigmatised and excluded from 'the people'.
  - They are defined as being a threat to and a burden on society.
  - Those groups are blamed for all misfortune and accidents affecting the general population.
  - The 'pure people' should fight (or help the fight) against these stigmatised groups.



## ABOUT THIS LESSON

The images used in the curriculum can be found online and are freely accessible.

The curriculum is for educational purposes only.

Compulsory and recommended literature sources for the given course were used as sources for the lesson.

This teaching material has been made at the University of Szeged, and supported by the European Union by the project nr. EFOP-3.6.2-16-2017-00007, titled Aspects on the development of intelligent, sustainable and inclusive society: social, technological, innovation networks in employment and digital economy. The project has been supported by the European Union, co-financed by the European Social Fund and the budget of Hungary.

**SZÉCHENYI** 



HUNGARIAN  
GOVERNMENT

European Union  
European Social  
Fund



INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE