

The Rise of Populism:

A Global Approach

Entering a new supercycle of uncertainty

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Summary:

Historically, “populism” has meant everything but nothing. In our view, populism is a strategy that political entrepreneurs employ to achieve power, which consists of exploiting a widespread sense of insecurity among the public and taking advantage of an underlying public favorability for extra-institutional measures to fix a broken system.

Populism capitalizes on perceptions that the system is broken and that liberal institutions must be changed or eliminated; an “us vs. them” discourse; and social or economic conditions that make disruption possible.

Key drivers of populist episodes today include:

- (1) A common feeling that institutions are unresponsive to or detached from one’s needs, values, and priorities and,*
- (2) In many, but certainly not all, countries, a perception that immigration has weakened social order, national cohesion or economic opportunities for the native-born, and/or a wide economic or cultural gap between immigrants and native-born citizens.*



Ipsos and Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) recently held a summit in Washington, DC to discuss what defines, conditions and drives populism.

The first part of the event brought together academics, economists, diplomats, representatives from think tanks, and corporate executives for a series of open discussions on populism.

Participants took part in breakout discussion groups moderated by Ipsos researchers to share and confront their views on three main questions:

1. What is populism – and is it what we are witnessing?
2. What are the drivers of populism?
3. How do these drivers vary across time and region?

These discussions generated relevant insights, identified cohesive themes, and sparked new questions and directions for further research and discussion.

The event also included a panel discussion open to the public, featuring panelists Ben Smith, Editor-in-Chief of BuzzFeed, Dr. Sheri Berman, Barnard College Professor of political science, Dr. Francisco González, Johns Hopkins SAIS Professor of Latin American Studies, Dr. Chris Garman, Eurasia Group's Head of Country Analysis, and moderated by Dr. Clifford Young, President of Ipsos Public Affairs U.S. The panel was attended by over one hundred guests, aired on C-SPAN, and was live-streamed by Johns Hopkins SAIS.

Populism Is a Strategy, not an Ideology

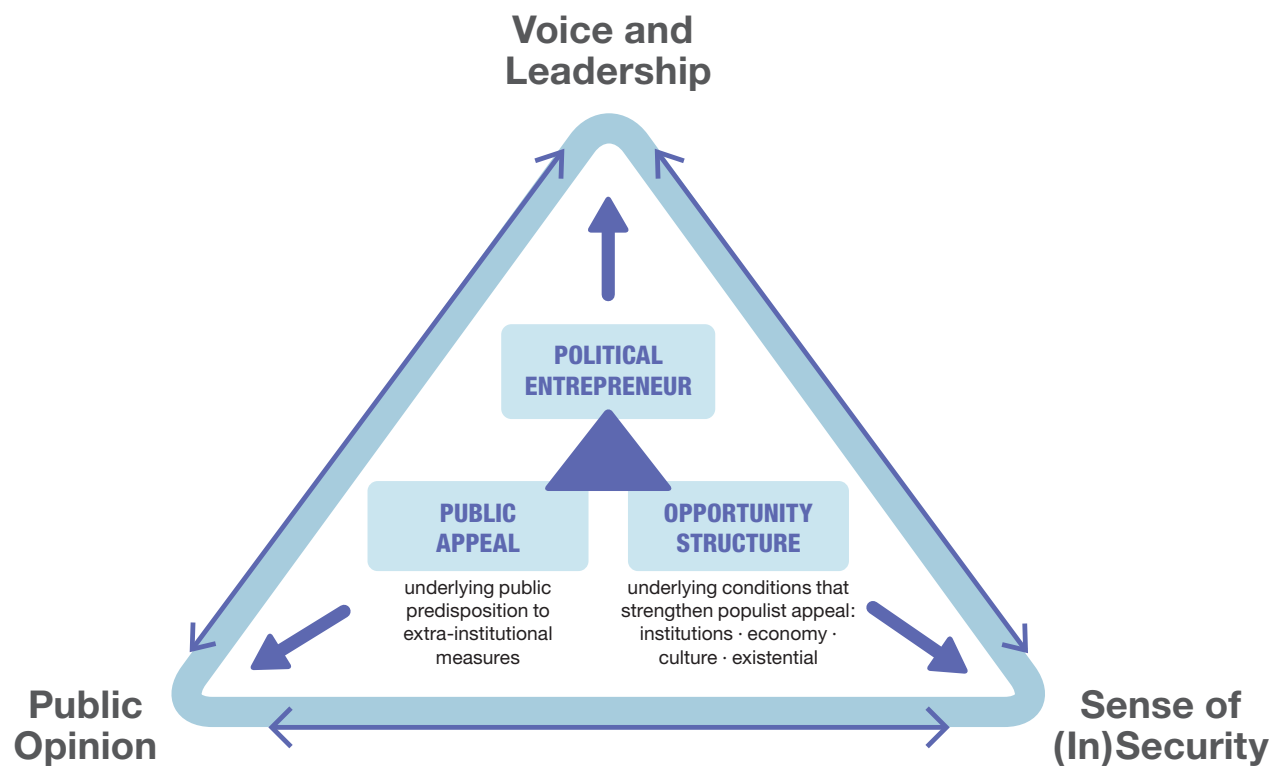
At Ipsos, we believe that populism is not actually an ideology, but rather a political strategy that operates around three key conditions:

1. Public appeal (favorable public opinion for extra-institutional measures to fix a perceived broken system)
2. Opportunity structure (conditions that create a sense of insecurity, e.g., nativist fears, economic downturn, war, etc.)
3. Political entrepreneur (someone who gives voice and leadership, e.g., Trump, Sanders, Le Pen, etc.)

The relationship in which each of these three factors affects the other two – creating positive and negative feedback loops – and contributes to overall outcomes can be represented as a triangle. The behavioral traits that each of these general factors helps to produce for the likelihood of populism to gain traction and grow are described as follows:

1. The political entrepreneur provides the voice and leadership behind which the 'anti-establishment' forces rally;
2. The opportunity structure, when favorable to populism will produce a sense of insecurity among growing numbers of a given population;
3. The public appeal that the voice and leadership of the political entrepreneur uses by exploiting the insecurity created by a favorable opportunity structure can generate the conditions for collective action, that is, growing numbers among the population who are willing to back the political entrepreneur and his/her anti-establishment program in the ballot box, in social media, in public forums, and in the streets.

Conditions for Populism



Taking the recent US election as an example, Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders both acted as political entrepreneurs, espousing an “us versus them” rhetoric to rally base support, but pulling from different opportunity structures. Trump’s rhetoric strongly catered to concerns around immigration, whereas Sanders highlighted wealth

inequality as the center of the us versus them dichotomy. Both candidates gained support among their bases employing this populist strategy, and Trump ultimately came out on top, building public appeal by successfully playing antagonistic relationships off each other.

The Outcomes

This framework provided a launching point for discussion which yielded various themes. One of the themes that emerged was that as a political strategy, populism aligns itself with certain common characteristics: a sense that the system is broken and therefore liberal institutions must be abolished or reformed; an “us vs. them” discourse, often along economic or cultural lines; and conditions of disruption.

Perceptions that the system is broken prevail across the world

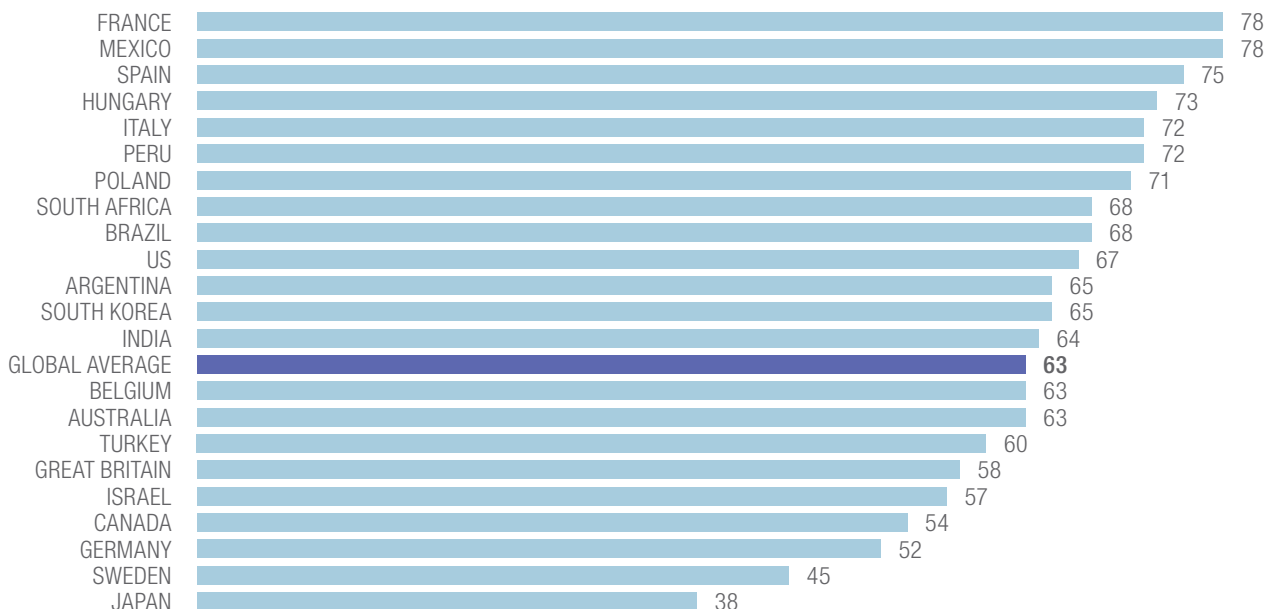
	U.S.	Global
Society is broken	67%	57%
Economy rigged for advantage of the rich and powerful	70%	69%
Need a strong leader to take it back from the rich and powerful	69%	63%
Confidence in institutions...		
Political Parties	18%	14%
The Media	27%	27%
Big companies	32%	36%

Base: 16,597 adults aged 16-64 in Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Peru, Poland, Serbia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Turkey; aged 18-64 in Canada and the United States., October 21-November 4, 2016

Global Perceptions of Broken System

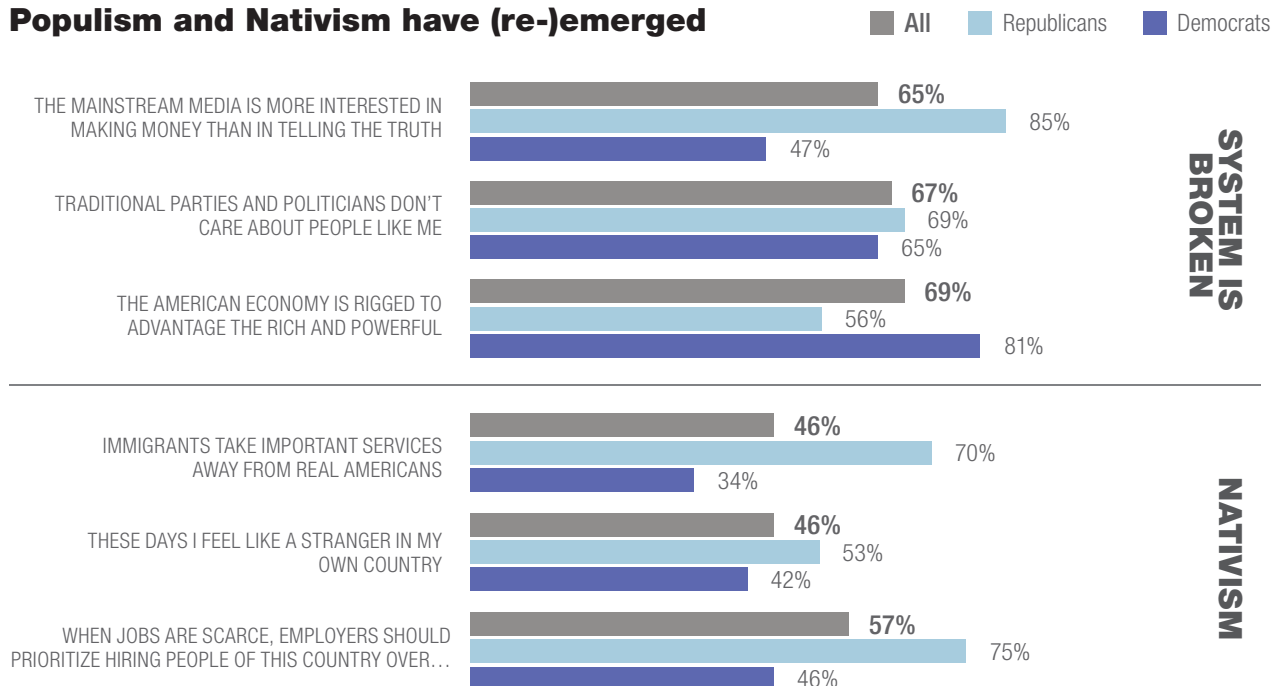
Q. To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Traditional parties and politicians don't care about people like me — Agree



Ipsos Global @dvisor poll conducted November 2016 among 16,597 global respondents

Populism and Nativism have (re-)emerged



Base: 2,016 U.S. adults, aged 18+, February 16-21, 2017

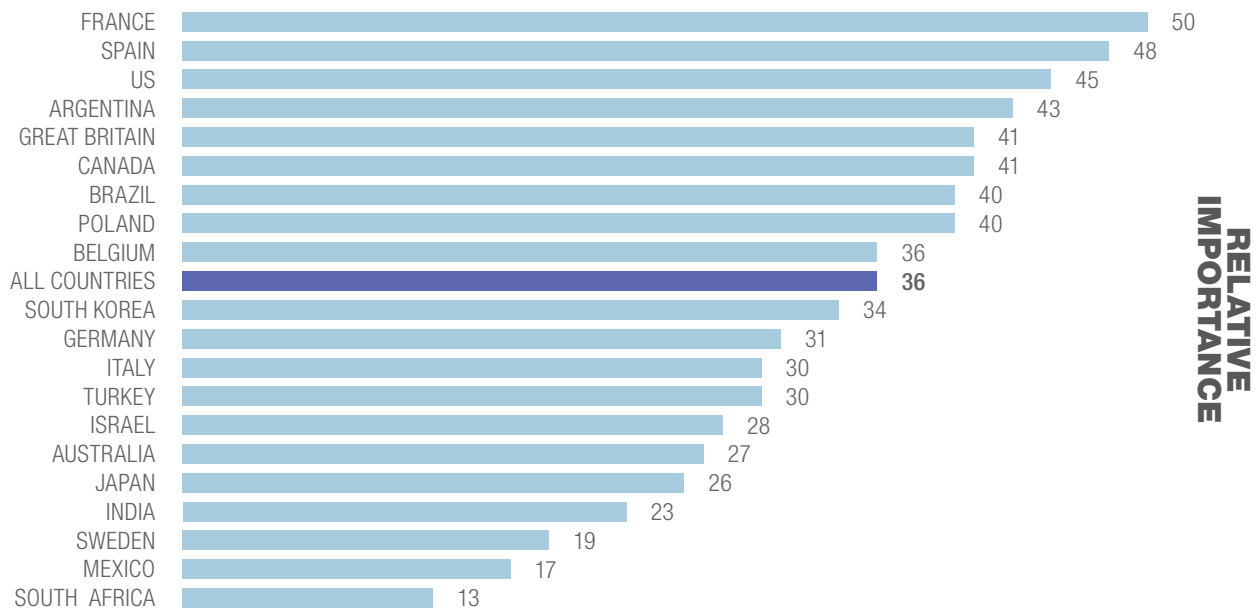
The idea that “the system is broken” stems from the perception that institutions are unresponsive to or detached from one’s needs and values; priorities. The belief that the system does not work for “people like me” and serves only a minority fosters anger and resentment, which political entrepreneurs then tap into. These drivers are not mutually exclusive. Traditionally, Latin American populism has generally been driven by a sense that the system is broken because of cyclical wealth inequality. Economic advances grow the middle class which then becomes angry with political institutions that cannot keep pace. North American and European populism is currently driven by the nativist current with a strong helping of “the system is broken.”

When viewed as a strategy, populist politicians are using a similar strategy over time but attaching it to different inequities in an opportunistic fashion. Historical shifts generally create instability which provides fertile ground for the above drivers of populism. The current historical shift is globalization.

Populist strategy can take several forms, and one of which has enjoyed recent prominence is “nativist populism”. Nativist populism thrives in countries where immigration is perceived as disrupting – or presenting a potential risk to disrupt – social order, national cohesion or economic opportunities for the native-born, and/or where there is a wide economic or cultural gap between immigrants and native-born citizens.

While this nativist “flavor” of populism has become a disruptive political force in many countries with high levels of immigration (U.S., U.K., France, Netherlands all being recent examples), this is not the case in all of them (e.g., Canada where immigrants tend to be well-educated and Spain where many hail from Spanish-speaking countries). Countries with low levels of immigration that show high levels of nativist populism tend to be ethnically homogenous (e.g., Hungary and Poland).

Key Drivers: Nativism + System is Broken



Ipsos Global @dvisor poll conducted November 2016 among 16,597 global respondents. Importance weights derived from Logistic Regression Logics

Perception also plays an important psychological component to alignment with populism. What is important isn't whether the institutions are objectively responsive or detached, but rather the discrepancy between baseline expectations of how receptive and engaged institutions ought to be and perceptions of the institutions themselves. Or between expectations of how immigrants should assimilate and perceptions of how differently they are and behave.

There is also a cultural component as cultures differ in how they react to immigration. Loss aversion is a powerful motivator of our beliefs and behaviors.

The looming potential threat of lost economic opportunity due to immigration can elicit strong reactions. Potential economic loss is typically a stronger motivator than potential economic gain, so therefore one could posit that it's easier to motivate a population by the threat of loss than by the opportunity for prosperity.

When the perception of the system being broken aligns with nativist fears, the results are especially strong, as depicted in the graph above.

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