

Producerist Populism and Its Impact on Electoral Support in the USA and Western Europe

Dr. Md. Riyad Siddiquei¹

Abstract: Producerist populism, which presents productive citizens as the main force in society and opposes the so-called parasitic elite and dependent groups. In recent years, it has been influencing electoral dynamics in the United States and Western Europe. This study adopts an inductive approach (secondary data), examining the impact of producerist populist narratives on electoral support in France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. By analyzing recent elections, political discourse, and challenges in voter opinion, this study identifies the directions of producerist populism's appeal and influence in different national contexts. According to observations, producerist rhetoric played a significant role in the 2024 Republican primaries and general elections in the United States, where debates over economic nationalism and elite corruption influenced voter choices. In France, Marine Le Pen's political strength in the 2024 European Parliament elections reflects the stability of the producerist narrative, which has taken a stance against economic liberalization and immigration. The AFD's increased support in the 2025 federal elections in Germany (152 seats or 20.8% of the vote) showed that economic discontent and anti-establishment sentiment are still the main driving forces. In Italy, the latest post-election political situation has maintained tensions over EU policy and national sovereignty, with producerist issues driving right-wing populist discourse. In Switzerland, referendums on welfare and immigration policies have shown that producerist concerns are directly influencing democratic decisions. In the UK, post-Brexit economic policies and working-class discontent have maintained the influence of producerist populism in political party tactics.

Keywords: Producerist populism, Electoral support, Western Europe, USA.

Introduction

Production-centered populist sentiment has become an important analytical topic in modern politics, particularly noticeable in the United States and Western Europe. One of the most important political developments of the last ten years is the rise of populism, which is evident in many nations with a wide range of political views (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013, De la Torre, 2019). Since the 2008 financial crisis, right-wing populist parties have placed a greater emphasis on socioeconomic issues (Ibsen, 2019; Guriev and Papaioannou, 2020; Rodrik, 2021). Populist movements in the region are gaining popularity, responding to the concerns of the "productive" classes, many of whom feel they are being exploited by elites, immigrants, and global economic forces. The core theory of production-centered populism is a division within society where a distinction is made between a hard-working "producing class" and a "parasitic elite", who enjoy the

¹ Independent Researcher, Email: Riyadgp@gmail.com

proceeds of the labor of others but make no relevant contribution to the economy. This thinking is gaining strength in several Western European countries, including the United States, Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, where economic insecurity, concerns about globalization, and immigration have created a sense of deprivation among certain groups. Populist parties in both the United States and Western Europe have built their popularity on this sentiment, positioning themselves as defenders of the “real” people – those who feel their values, livelihoods, and cultural identity are being neglected by elite power. A productive lens through which to examine populism is producerism – an older idea that has received significant attention in the U.S. populism literature (Berlet and Lyons, 2000; Kazin, 2017; Berlet, 2020). Producerism usually indicates an ethical difference between “makers” and “takers” that shames unworthy people and holes those “who generate society’s prosperity against those who consume it without repaying” (HoSang and Lowndes, 2019: 24). Illustrating on the Laclauian formulation of populism’s “empty signifiers” (Laclau 2005), we suggest that producerism may be noticed as one particular mode of explanation of the standard populist signifiers and hostility. It is crucial to analyze this production-centric “populist” sentiment and electoral popularity, as it is influencing broader trends in politics in both regions, particularly through economic nationalism, anti-immigration policies; and criticism of the established political structure.

Methodology

This study adopts an inductive approach (secondary data), focusing on the impact of producerist populism in the United States and Western Europe (France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Switzerland), focusing primarily on grassroots political movements. A combination of case studies, voter surveys, and media content analysis was used to collect data, analyzing populist campaigns that prioritized working class interests. The emerging ideas are analyzed to identify common themes within the region, particularly how populist rhetoric has become relevant to voters who feel disenfranchised by economic globalization. The study draws conclusions about the impact of producerist populism by identifying changes in voter attitudes, party allegiances, and political priorities using inductive reasoning. Ultimately, this study provides insights into the regional dynamics of voter support for producerist populism, analyzing the role of economic hardship, cultural familiarity, and national sovereignty.

Theoretical Framework

In our perspective, the concept of producerism presents a productive viewpoint for the study of current economic populism. Although not inevitably related to populism, producerism has been frequently applied by scholars of right-wing populism, particularly in the United States (Berlet and Lyons, 2000; Kazin, 2017; HoSang and Lowndes, 2019; Berlet, 2020).

Producerism is usually based on the hostility between the “productive members of society”, depicted as “virtuous” producers and potential victims, on one hand, and “parasitical strata both higher and lower them in the social hierarchy”, which contain both “economic and political elites” and “the poor, jobless, and those who accept social

welfare” (Shantz, 2014: 560; see also HoSang and Lowndes, 2019: 24). The producerist oratory forms producers as a menaced “good” people by different “parasitic” groups, both at the peak and at the lowest level of society, by assessing them according to the recognized input to the common good. (e.g. Berlet and Lyons, 2000).

The producerist Manichean defiance between “producers” and “parasites”, that is a particular “in-group” versus “out-group” rivalry, matches the meaning of populism as a logic of bitterness. As Silva and Vieira (2019) suggest, bitterness can be viewed the “true” reasoning of populism, functioning “within an adversarial structure, which assumes recognition between the divisions of the population and refers to a set of standard promises” (Cohen, 2019 : 498).

Producerism may be observed as a problem-solving class, which is entrenched in the wider populist concept. Here, we attract on the difference between “form” and “content”, which is core to the Laclauian formulation of the “empty signifier” (Vulovic and Palonen, 2022; Laclau, 2005), as well as to current comprehensive views on populism (e.g. Ballacci and Goodman, 2023). We suggest that, within the economic domain, producerism embodies one particular method of explanation –i.e. a attainable “content”– of usual populist signifiers and enmity –i.e. the common “form” of populism.

France

The rise of producerist populism in France has been largely led by Marine Le Pen. Marine Le Pen’s political party (National Rally) has gained popularity among the working class. In the 2017 and 2022 elections, her party’s support increased significantly. Marine Le Pen and her party promote nationalist and anti-immigration messages. Her party’s support has been strong in rural and low-income areas of France. During the election campaign, she spoke of defending French culture and workers’ rights. France’s populist parties are anti-European Union and anti-immigration. Le Pen had widespread support against Emmanuel Macron in 2022. Marine Le Pen’s rhetoric supports populist political forces, especially her stance on economic rights and sovereignty. Working class discontent in France has played a key role in Marine Le Pen’s campaign. Her party’s support was greater in rural areas and outlying cities. Left-wing parties in France have not paid much attention to producerist populism. Marine Le Pen’s party’s support has raised concerns about the power, particularly over immigration policy. Populist forces in France could become stronger if more attention is paid to workers’ rights. Her party is more focused on sovereignty and cultural identity. As for right-wing populism, current studies highlight the function of worthiness, views, impartiality, and broadly, ethical evaluations in relation to socio-economic clashes (Busemeyer et al. 2021; Attewell 2021; Enggist and Pinggera 2022). Ideologically diverse social protest movements like the Yellow Jackets in France can integrate elements of producerism into their demands and rhetoric (Guerra, Alexandre and Gonthier, 2020).

United States of America

Producerist populism gained strength in the United States in 2016. Donald Trump won the 2016 election with a populist message. He opposes economic nationalism and the global

market. Donald Trump has turned the working class into supporters of his party. Joe Biden won the 2020 election, but there is a populist influence. Biden embraces progressive policies for rights. Donald Trump also won the 2024 election. Donald Trump is promoting economic nationalism and opposing immigration. He has attracted many voters through producerist populism. In the United States, the working class and rural areas supported him. Donald Trump does not support global trade agreements. Anti-elite sentiment is growing among voters. Immigration policy and national sovereignty are important issues. In the 2024 elections, populist influence increased further. Producerist populism continues to play an important role in American politics. Left-leaning economic populism closely linked with social disparities and economic democracy has also been peexisting in US political history (Grattan, 2016; Warren, 2020), as illustrated by BernieSanders's left-wing populism in the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination (Hawkins and Littvay, 2019). Modern data-driven studies on economic populist opinions in the United Sates reveal that these views often align with liberal or progressive ideologies, pointing to the presence of populism within the American left (Barker and DeTamble, 2022).Although the American two-party system and the role of party recognition are distinctive and notable, it continues valuable to examine how citizens with producerist opinions might match themselves between the two major parties and their candidates in a assumed presidential race(Ware, 1996; Abramowitz and McCoy, 2019), This finding supports recent research suggesting that the attitudes of Trump supporters closely resemble those of the radical right in Europe(Arhin et al. 2023). At the same time, in the United States, Donald Trump's explanation of radical right-wing populism conveys powerful parallels with populist radical right in Europe (Hawkins and Littvay, 2019; Mudde, 2022).

Germany

The main force of producerist populism in Germany is the AFD party. The AFD Party receives support from working class and rural voters. Their main point is anti-immigration and anti-European Union. In 2017, the AFD gained strong representation in parliament for the first time. In 2021, the party advocated for nationalist conservatism and worker's rights. The AFD party is particularly popular in poor and rural areas of West Germany. The party highlights the demands of the working class, in contrast to the Marxist and Green parties. They also contested the 2021 elections. Alexander Gauland of the AFD party took a tough stance on the party's policies. The AFD party's message among the working class has generated attention for economic justice and national security. The AFD's influence in German elections has been decisive in the current political environment. AFD party leaders want to prove that the AFD cares about workers' problems. Among Germany's populist parties, the AFD is the only one that prioritizes support for workers. Rural voters and the working class support this party. Producerist populism could become even stronger in the upcoming elections, led by the AFD party. In the 2025 German federal election, the AFD (Alternative for Germany) received 20.8% of the vote (152 seats) and came in second place in the election. Populism tends to be more visible on the right in Germany, where anti-system sentiments are stronger, whereas the radical left exhibits less of a populist character (Hough and Keith, 2019).

Italy

The main leader of producerist populism in Italy is Giorgia Meloni. The Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy) party has grown stronger under Meloni's leadership. Meloni promoted working class rights and nationalism. Anti-immigration and anti-globalization sentiments dominate Italian politics. Her party has gained popularity among rural voters. Meloni has increased support among workers with a 'patriotic' political message. In 2022, Meloni's party's victory was considered a key aspect of the populist movement. She spoke about the country's economic security and the preservation of national culture. In 2018, Her party ran for election promising revolutionary change. Meloni's party has won the support of most of the working class and rural people. Nationalist ideology is gradually becoming popular among the people in Italy. Italy's left-wing parties have taken a stand against populist policies. However, Meloni's nationalist rhetoric has become stronger within the party. Meloni and her political party are opposed to global markets. In Italy, producerist populism may become more dominant in the future. In Italy, our findings may show the intricacy of right-wing populist politics, and the integration of both the Lega and FdI into the center-right alliance, therefore creating it more harder to perceive variations within this wider right-wing alliance in what has been explained as an progressively 'deinstitutionalized party framework' (Chiaramonte et al. 2022).

Switzerland

In Switzerland, the SVP party is associated with produceristpopulism. The SVP party has the support of workers and rural voters. The SVP party campaigns on anti-immigration and national security. This party plays an important role in the political context of Switzerland. Party leaders oppose globalization and support workers' rights. The Swiss People's Party performed very well in the 2023 elections (62 seats). The SVP party's influence is strong in poor and rural areas of Switzerland. They have spoken about maintaining the country's independence and heavenly conditions in various elections. The strength of the SVP party has had a powerful impact on the country's citizens in the democratic process. The party is supported by the working class and rural voters in Switzerland. The party's presence in Switzerland's electoral process has definitely had an impact. The SVP is receiving the majority of votes in the Party's democratic process. The working class and people of the country feel a strong attraction to it. The SVP party has repeatedly expressed concerns about Switzerland's national sovereignty. Producerist populism may become stronger in Switzerland in the coming days.

The United Kingdom

The Brexit movement in the UK is a strong populist example. The UKIP and reform UK parties are supporters of populist policies. These parties campaign on anti-immigration and national security. Brexit has increased electoral support and populist messages have been broadcast. The UK has increased nationalist sentiment through the Brexit transition. UKIP (UK independence party) speaks to protect racial polarity and culture. The rhetoric of the Reform UK party is very strong, especially on immigration and economic policy.

The 2016 Brexit referendum particularly strengthened populist forces. However, this power sometimes creates social classes. Brexit has been an important foundation for the populist movement. Nationalist parties have become popular among voters in the UK. Currently, nationalist forces, and anti-immigration, are playing a major role in the UK elections. Although, populist power may be waning somewhat in the UK, it remains important. Producerist populism will become more important in the UK. Brexit will be front and center with a strong populist vision. Recent research also indicates that the British Conservative Party, under Boris Johnson's leadership, has largely embraced or absorbed elements of right-wing populism in the UK (Evans et al.2023; Ward and Ward 2023). Though UKIP and the Brexit Party have turned voting-wise negligible in the post-Brexit period, Boris Johnson's leadership of the Conservative Party appropriated important populism and flourished on popular suspicion with the country's political elite (Evans et al. 2023; Ward and Ward,2023).

Conclusion

Producerist populism is strongest in the United States and France, and the political language and leadership of these countries have become aligned with populist tastes. While populist influence is somewhat contained or limited in Italy and the UK, it could grow further in the future. Populist forces are relatively small in Germany and Switzerland, but some influence has been created through the AFD and SVP parties. Overall, producerist populism is having a strong impact on elections and its influence may become more important in European and US politics in the future. In Western Europe(France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Switzerland) and the United States, producerist populist attitudes – where the productive common people are seen as morally superior to “parasitic” elites and outsiders – have greatly stimulated the 2023-24 elections, especially among voters facing economic uncertainty in the middle and lower classes. For example, in Italy, the government of Giorgia Meloni exploited this attitude and gained support from the peasantry and working class. In Donald Trump's 2024 campaign in the United States, the idea of American workers versus Washington elites has been a powerful tool to unite voters. Fahey, for instance, analyzed the populist rhetoric of presidential candidates in the United States between 1896 and 2016 and claims that producerism “provides populism much of its ethical tone, asserting that the people deserve to rule because of the tangible worth they add to the body politic” (Fahey, 2021:1272).Recent research indicates that traditional measures of populism overlook public attitudes toward “non-political” elites, including scholars, bureaucrats, and business executives (Jungkunz et al. 2021). In producerism, prosperity and equity are not solely material entities but also rely on how individuals discern and experience practices, objects, political causes and their relations with others (Sayer, 2011: 3-4). The idea of producerism is connected to the concept of the ‘moral economy’, a topic that has been widely explored in the social sciences and, lately, in political science (Arnold, 2001). The moral economy refers to how people justify economic practices, including their views on markets, reallocation, and egalitarianism, as well as the socio-economic values they follow, which influence their sense of fairness across various contexts (Koos and Sachweh, 2019).

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