

The Political Psychology of Populism

CEU Summer University 2016

04 July – 13 July

Political psychology is the study of political behaviour of individuals and groups in the context of what we know about human psychological characteristics. It is a discipline at the intersection of political science and psychology and includes research on various topics, such as the formation and change of political attitudes and ideologies and how these relate to political behaviour (e.g. voting or political participation more broadly), the formation of group identities and intergroup conflict, including nationalism and extremism, ethnic identities, gender roles and many other essential and problematic areas of our social and political existence. All of these topics concern the attitudes, ideas and belief systems – ideologies – that people hold and which thus structure political behaviour.

The substantive focus of this specific course is a political issue that has pressing importance in our days, all across Europe and the Americas: populism. Our first aim is to introduce students to a quickly developing field of research, that of studying how a preference for populist and anti-politics discourses can be understood at a psychological level, mostly, but not exclusively, through the use of surveys and experiments. Second, we wish to help developing students' research skills by providing room for hands-on activities where participants engage with designing and carrying on research on such topics using the methods taught in the course. Third, we also intend to continue growing the political psychology and populism research communities in CEE, giving participants a chance to interact with top-level scholars in these areas, from Europe and America. The course features seminars on methods and substantive topics on populism, round table discussions on publishing and grant writing, practical research design and implementation workshops, students' own project presentations, and a day with lecture and workshop specifically on policy implications, to help students who are looking for ways to see their research have a direct impact on politics and decision-making.

Course Overview

This week-and-a-half course at the CEU Summer University in 2016 is oriented towards PhD (or advanced MA) students and junior researchers/faculty from all over the world. The course is intended for approximately 25 participants who are supervised by 8 faculty members. The faculty of the course includes:

- Levente Littvay (Associate Professor, CEU), course director
- Jennifer McCoy (Professor of Political Science, Georgia State University)
- Zsolt Enyedi (Professor of Political Science, CEU)
- Erin K. Jenne (Associate Professor, CEU)
- Kirk Hawkins (Associate Professor, Brigham Young University)
- Ryan Carlin (Associate Professor, Georgia State University)
- Matthew Singer (Associate Professor, University of Connecticut)
- Nebojša Blanuša (Assistant Professor, University of Zagreb)

The course is divided into five main themes: the first introduces students to the basic methods and topics in Political Psychology. These include introductions to experimental research, surveys, and their use for social sciences. The second block introduces the substantive part of the course:

populism. Lectures focus on the main theories behind it, presenting how populist discourse is conceived and observed among individuals (demand-side), and politicians and parties (supply-side). There will also be specific sessions focusing on the peculiarities of populism in Europe and Latin America, and how these differences might affect and inform individual-level research.

The third and fourth parts focus each on one of the main methods in political psychology: surveys and experiments. First, we discuss the appropriate ways to develop scales, a basic topic in psychology which political scientists often miss, with the introduction to psychometrics. Lectures then focus on how this may be used to study populism and attitudes related to it. The fourth block looks at experiments, which are being used now to understand both the causes of support for populist discourse, as well as the consequences of being exposed to it. Different alternatives of treatments, framings, and how to reproduce real-life situations when experimenting in such a topic are issues to be discussed in this part. The last block is on how to integrate populism research into policy-making. We discuss the potential policy implications of the topics treated in the course, and how they may inform policy-makers on dealing with the emergence of populist actors.

Besides lectures, a significant part of the course consists of practical activities to advance participants' own research. Therefore, during the application process, candidate participants will submit an outline (500 words) of a research paper/thesis/manuscript draft. If they are accepted to the course, they are required to submit the full draft of the work in progress (approx. 3000 words, see application requirements for more details). During the course, students will present their ongoing projects, and get feedback from peers and faculty members. Two weeks after the end of the course, the participants will have to resubmit an improved version of their papers, which takes into account the feedback obtained during the course and the workshops. In addition to explicit discussions during the workshops, the submitted work in progress of the accepted participants will enable us to adjust the methodological and substantive seminars of the course to a certain extent so that they would, as much as possible, meet the needs of the participants. We also plan three 4-hours sessions of practical workshops. These are hands-on activities on designing and implementing individual-level research on populism.

Assessment

There will be no formal assessment of the performance of participants. Attendance of the seminars and workshops is a prerequisite for receiving the certificate of the class.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1

04 – 08 July 2016

Introduction day

Monday, July 4th

13:30 – 14:20 **Welcoming lecture** (Levente Littvay), 60 min (lecture)

14:40 – 17:50 **Science speed dating** (Bruno Castanho Silva) , 150 min (workshop)

Block 1: Introduction to Political Psychology.

This block is devoted to an introduction to Political Psychology. We will approach the subject from the two most common approaches used to do empirical research in Political Psychology: Survey Designs and Experiments. It includes a short introduction to how experiments work and how they are used in Political Psychology. The final session introduces students to an online platform, Amazon's Mechanical Turk, which has been increasingly used for social sciences surveys and experiments in the past few years.

Tuesday, July 5th

10:00 – 12:00 **Introduction to Political Psychology** (Levente Littvay), 100 min (seminar)

13:30 – 15:30 **Introduction to Experiments** (Levente Littvay), 100 min (seminar)

The goal of this session is to communicate the basic logic of experimental design to the few who might not have been exposed to it in the past. More importantly, it will review more complex designs for experiments and extend the logic of experimental research to observational studies. We will review lab, field, natural and quasi-experiments alike.

15:50 – 16:40 **Amazon's Mechanical Turk for Social Sciences Research** (Levente Littvay and Bruno Castanho Silva), 50 min (seminar)

In this session we will introduce students to Amazon's Mechanical Turk, an online tool that has been increasingly used by social scientists to conduct surveys and experiments. We will discuss its advantages and pitfalls when compared to other common sources of participants for surveys in psychology, and present a guide on when and how to use it.

17:00 – 19:00 **Student presentations** (All faculty), 100 min

Block 2 – Theoretical and Empirical Aspects of Populism

“Populism” is a term used by many, in many different ways. The purpose of this section is to briefly discuss the main definitions of the concept, focusing on the so-called *ideational* perspective, used in most empirical research of the topic at an individual level. It will also introduce other macro-level aspects of populism, as the presence of this discourse among parties, political elites, and media, and the regional variance found in studies in Europe and Latin America.

Wednesday, July 6th

10:00 – 12:00 **Introduction to Populism: Conceptual issues** (Kirk Hawkins), 100 min (seminar)

Populism has traditionally been a fiercely debated concept, but in recent years a degree of consensus has begun to emerge about definitions. In this session, we outline the main conceptual approaches, with an emphasis on the ideational approach. We also discuss how concepts inform theories of populism.

13:30 – 14:20 **Supply-side Populism: Parties and Politicians** (Zsolt Enyedi), 50 min (seminar)

The session discusses whether it is useful to think in terms of a populist party family, differentiates populist parties from extremist parties and distinguishes populist party strategy from populist

ideology and discourse.

14:40 – 19:00 **Student presentations** (All faculty), 200 min

Thursday, July 7th

10:00 – 10:50 **Regional Variances I: European Populism** (Zsolt Enyedi), 50 min (seminar)

The sessions analyzes the recent successes and failures of populist parties in Europe and considers the position of these parties on various policy dimensions. We also consider whether populist parties can be distinguished by their organizational structure.

11:10 – 12:00 **Regional Variances II: Latin American Populism** (Matthew Singer), 50 min (seminar)

This seminar analyzes the performance of populist actors in Latin America, with focus on the wave of left-populism that emerged in the region since the rise of Hugo Chavez in 1999. It discusses these parties' discourse and the social groups and issues they mobilize.

13:30 – 14:20 **What Lacanian Psychoanalysis Could Say about Populism: Analysis of Discourses, Images, and Affects** (Nebojša Blanuša), 50 min (seminar)

This seminar will analyse recent attempts to understand populism through the lens of Lacanian psychoanalysis, with the special focus on fundamental registers of experiences, namely the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic, as well as on their application in the Essex school of discourse theory. Prominent object of study of this school was the populism itself, which will be analysed through the several empirical studies, conducted by proponents of this approach.

14:40 – 19:00 **Student presentations** (All faculty), 200 min

Block 3 – Surveys and populist attitudes, and Academic Workshops

While populism is a frequently used term, its usual negative connotation means that few individuals would actually identify themselves as such. Researchers, therefore, have to test it by looking at different sets of characteristics that compose the concept. These sections deal with the efforts to achieve this. They discuss questions on the measurement of populism and other related socio-political psychological constructs.

Friday, July 8th

10:00 – 10:50 **Introduction to Psychometrics and the Measurement of Populist Attitudes** (Levente Littvay and Nebojša Blanuša), 50 min (seminar)

11:10 – 12:00 **Psychological Foundations of Populist Attitudes** (Levente Littvay and Nebojša Blanuša), 50 min (seminar)

Conspiratorial thinking against political elites is one of the most prominent features of populism. Furthermore, psychological explanations of people's propensity to conspiracy theories significantly

overlap with similar explanations of populism. This seminar will try to deconstruct such psychological explanations as well as to discuss some recent representations of psychology of populism on the film, through discussing the film "Outskirts" (1998).

13:30 – 14:20 **Grant Writing Workshop** (All faculty) chaired by Erin K. Jenne. 50 min (round table)

An essential part of doing original research in contemporary academia hinges on securing funding. In this seminar, the faculty will share their experience on how to write convincing grant proposals.

14:40 – 17:50 **Student presentations** (All faculty), 150 min

WEEK 2

11-13 July, 2016

Monday, July 11th

10:00 – 10:50 **Publications Workshop** (All faculty) chaired by Erin K. Jenne. 50 min (round table)

In this workshop, the faculty will present suggestions and tips for young researchers to start getting their work published. Based on experience as writers, reviewers, and editors, they discuss how graduate students and junior scholars can get their publication portfolios going in contemporary social sciences.

11:10 – 12:00 **Correlates of Populist Attitudes** (Matthew Singer), 50 min (seminar)

13:30 – 17:50 **Practice Workshop I – Theory** (All faculty), chaired by Kirk Hawkins, 200 min (workshop).

In the first of our three practical workshops, students will be divided into groups to elaborate hypotheses derived from the different strands of populism theory, which can be tested in survey or experimental settings. The class and faculty together will then discuss the work of each group.

Block 4 – Experiments

The “gold-standard” for testing causal relations, experiments are growing more popular in the social sciences, and have started to reach populism research. In these seminars we focus on how it is possible to identify both causes of support for populist parties, as well as whether (and of what kind) the consumption of populist discourse has an impact over people's perception of society and politics.

Tuesday July 12th

10:00 – 10:50 **Experiments and Populism** (Ryan Carlin), 50 min (seminar)

11:10 – 16:40 **Practice Workshop II – Experiments and Surveys** (all faculty), chaired by Ryan Carlin and Matthew Singer, 200 min (workshop)

In the second practical workshop, students will be divided into groups with the task of elaborating a plan for an experiment or survey related to populism research, which should include the basic

elements of each kind of study as discussed in class. Each group will present and discuss their idea with the faculty and other students.

17:00 – 17:50 **Polarization and Populism** (Jennifer McCoy), 50 min (seminar)

Populism employs divisive rhetoric and populist candidates often use a polarizing strategy in electoral contests that can exacerbate existing divisions. On the other hand, societies divided along ethnic, ideological, class, religious, or other lines may provide the space for populist candidates to succeed. Thus the question: is polarization a cause or a consequence of populism?

Block 5 – Policy implications and Closing Lecture

Considering all that was discussed in the course, how can the understanding of individual-level factors behind support for populist politics be translated into political action and policy-making? Is there a better way to “deal” with these parties – if they have to be dealt with at all?

Wednesday July 13th

10:00 – 10:50 **Policy Implications of Populism Research** (Jennifer McCoy), 50 min (seminar)

Research on populism has important policy implications in three broad areas: a) by identifying the macro/structural underlying conditions creating demand for populist responses, we can inform the formation of specific policy prescriptions by development agencies and policymakers to help prevent the negative consequences of populist governance; b) by identifying the institutional design (electoral systems) and political party capacity factors, we can inform policymakers, politicians and civil society actors pursuing institutional reform or party strengthening activities ; c) by analyzing the micro/individual level, we can learn important lessons about the framing and messaging of political appeals. For example, if exploiting fear and insecurity is found to be an important cause of populism, then policy implications include not only strategies to address the underlying causes of these insecurities, but also framing strategies that would focus on more positive, constructive party platforms, policy proposals, and political messaging.

11:10 – 16:40 **Practice Workshop III – Application and Policy Implications** (All faculty), chaired by Jennifer McCoy, 200 min (workshop)

In this workshop, students are divided into groups and asked to come up with points to elaborate a policy briefing on how political institutions and civil society could respond to the rise of populism. Again, proposals are then discussed with the faculty and students.

17:00 – 17:50 **Closing lecture**, keynote speaker (Kirk Hawkins), 50 min (lecture)