

# THE THREAT OF POPULISM

**James M. Skidmore, University of Waterloo**  
**7 January 2020**

**[jamesmskidmore.com/presentations](http://jamesmskidmore.com/presentations)**

## Overview

What is going on?

What is populism?

Why is populism on the rise?

Why do we feel threatened by populism?

What can we do about populism?

Are we populists?

What have we learned about populism?

# Resources

[jamesmskidmore.com/presentations](http://jamesmskidmore.com/presentations)

- This slide deck
- Some resources informing this presentation

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James M Skidmore 1m

## The Threat of Populism

Lecture for Third Age Learning of Kitchener-Waterloo | 2020.01.07

Title Slide	Full Presentation	Resources - Books	Resources - Articles
	 <p>James M. Skidmore, University of Waterloo January 2020</p> <p>James M. Skidmore, University of Waterloo January 2020</p> <p>Threat of Populism - TAL Lecture Powerpoint presentation padlet drive</p>	<p><a href="https://global.oup.com/academic/product/populism-a-very-short-introduction-9780190234874?cc=ca&amp;lang=en&amp;">https://global.oup.com/academic/product/populism-a-very-short-introduction-9780190234874?cc=ca&amp;lang=en&amp;</a></p>  <p>Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser POPULISM A Very Short Introduction</p>	<p><b>The New Populism</b> Collection of articles from The Guardian</p>  <p>The new populism   The Guardian Rightwing populists are on the rise across the guardian</p> <p><b>Team Populism</b> Website featuring the research of a team of political scientists</p>  <p>Home Page Team Populism brings together renowned byu</p> <p><b>Additional Resources</b> Articles, mostly from newspapers and magazines, exploring aspects of populism today</p>  <p>The Threat of Populism - Additional Resources PDF document padlet drive</p>
	 <p>James M. Skidmore, University of Waterloo January 2020</p> <p>James M. Skidmore, University of Waterloo January 2020</p> <p>Threat of Populism - TAL Lecture PDF document padlet drive</p>	<p><a href="https://www.upenn.edu/pennpress/book/15615.html">https://www.upenn.edu/pennpress/book/15615.html</a></p>  <p>WHAT IS POPULISM? Jan-Werner Müller</p>	
		<p><a href="https://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=25175">https://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=25175</a></p>  <p>THE GLOBAL RISE OF POPULISM Performance, Political Style, and Representation</p>  <p>BENJAMIN HOFFITT</p>	

## Question 1

### **What is going on?**

What is populism?

Why is populism on the rise?

Why do we feel threatened by populism?

What can we do about populism?

Are we populists?

What have we learned about populism?

## Question 2

What is going on?

**What is populism?**

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## Question 2

### **What is populism?**

Three waves of populism:

- 19<sup>th</sup>-century rural Russia, America
  - *Narodniks* (= populists in Russian)
  - Populist (or People's) Party
- Mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century Latin America
- Early 21<sup>st</sup>-century Europe, Americas

## Question 2

### What is populism?

“Populism worships the people” (Ionescu and Gellner 1969)

Basic aim of populism: within a **democracy**, to represent the **will** of the **people** vis-à-vis an **elite**

## Question 2

### **What is populism?**

Core concept: the **people**

- People as sovereign
- Common people
- The nation



## Question 2

### What is populism?

Core concept: the **elite**

- Working against the interests of the people
- Preventing the realization of the general will

## Question 2

### What is populism?

Core concept: the **will** of the people

- Also known as the general will  
(Rousseau: *volonté générale*)
- Pure; faultless; the highest good of a nation

## Question 2

### **What is populism?**

Moral implications:

Basic aim of populism: within a democracy, to represent the will of the people vis-à-vis an elite

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*Populism moralizes politics, pitting good against evil*

## Question 2

### What is populism?

Analytical implications:

- Ideational
  - Cas **Mudde** – thin ideology
- Discursive
- Political
- Contextual

## Question 3

What is going on?

What is populism?

**Why is populism on the rise?**

Why do we feel threatened by populism?

What can we do about populism?

Are we populists?

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## Question 3

### **Why is populism on the rise?**

Populism thrives on grievance

- Social and economic turbulence
- Political unresponsiveness
- Government insularity
- Culture wars
- Social media

## Question 4

What is going on?

What is populism?

Why is populism on the rise?

**Why do we feel threatened by populism?**

What can we do about populism?

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## Question 4

**Why do  
we feel  
threatened  
by  
populism?**

Isn't rule of the people (democracy), as opposed to rule by one (autocracy) or the few (oligarchy), a good thing? Isn't populism about defending democracy?

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- Ernesto **Laclau** – populism can reinvigorate democracy by giving people a real voice in their affairs



## Question 4

**Why do  
we feel  
threatened  
by  
populism?**

Populism is by its nature confrontational

- Champions democracy (rule by the people)
- Challenges liberal democracy (democracy + rule of law + pluralism) → exclusion
- Anger | Fear-mongering | Brutality
- Where will it lead? → Hannah **Arendt**

## Question 4

**Why do  
we feel  
threatened  
by  
populism?**

Populists in power

- Demagoguery
- Occupation of the state
- Restriction of media
- Mass clientelism
- Pandering
- Paradox of populists becoming the elite

## Question 5

What is going on?

What is populism?

Why is populism on the rise?

Why do we feel threatened by populism?

**What can we do about populism?**

Are we populists?

What have we learned about populism?

## Question 5

**What can  
we do  
about  
populism?**

- Exclude
- Imitate
- Engage and debate – Jan-Werner **Müller**
- Educate

## Question 6

What is going on?

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What can we do about populism?

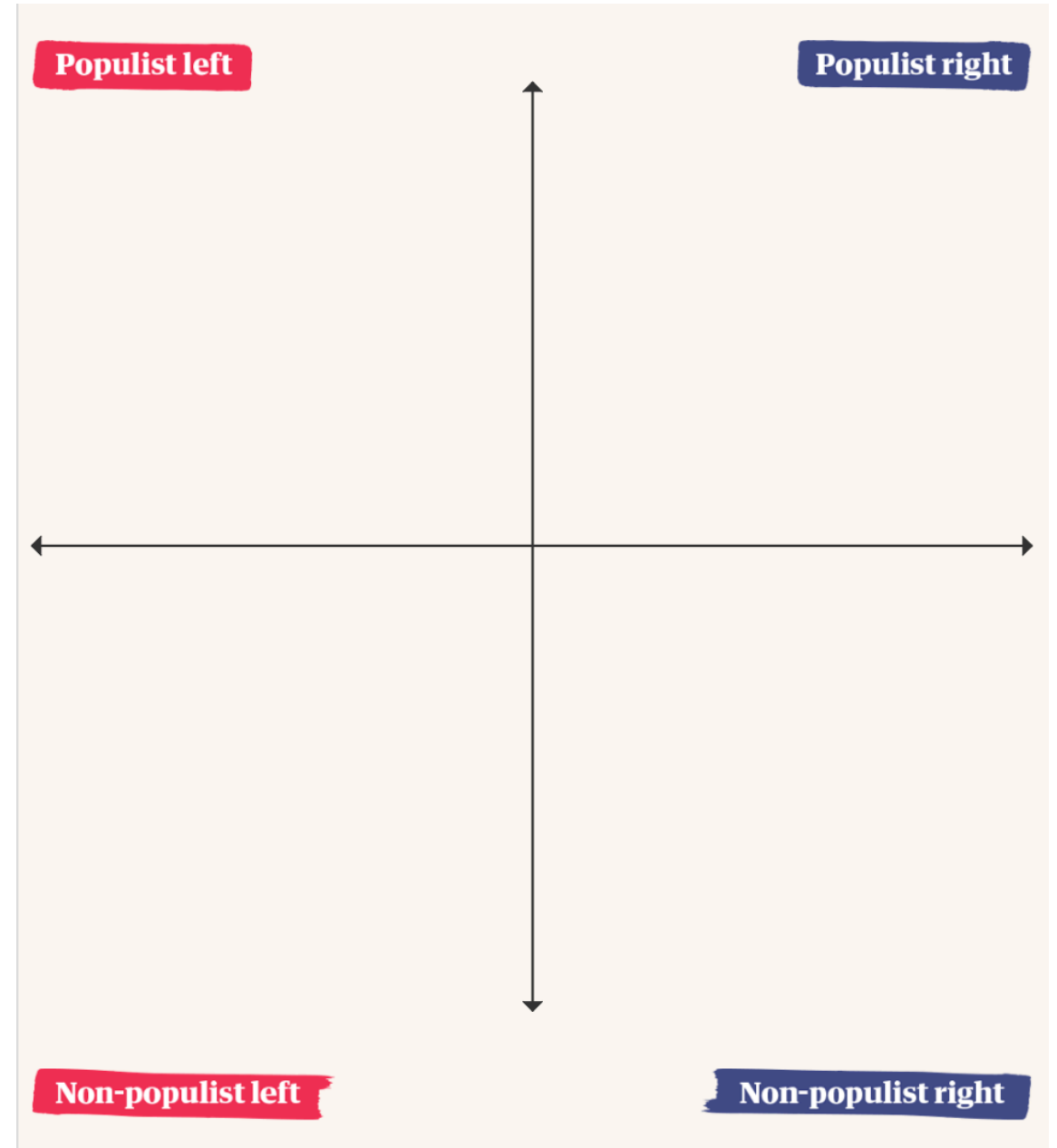
**Are we populists?**

What have we learned about populism?

## Question 6

**Are we  
populists?**

*The Guardian*  
populism quiz:



# Your results

Fewer responses    More responses

Populist left

Populist right

 Donald Trump

 Barack Obama

Your score

Non-populist left

Non-populist right



You're most similar to:

**Barack Obama**

*Former US president*

Barack Obama was the first person of colour to serve as president of the US, over two terms between 2008 and 2016. Although mostly moderate in rhetoric, he pushed hard for healthcare for poorer Americans.



You're least similar to:

**Donald Trump**

*US president*

Donald Trump is the president of the US. He has repeatedly failed to condemn radical rightwing activists, and for a time employed Steve Bannon on his presidential team.

# Where they sit

Populist left

Populist right

Bernie Sanders  
Pablo Iglesias

Evo Morales  
Andrés Manuel López Obrador

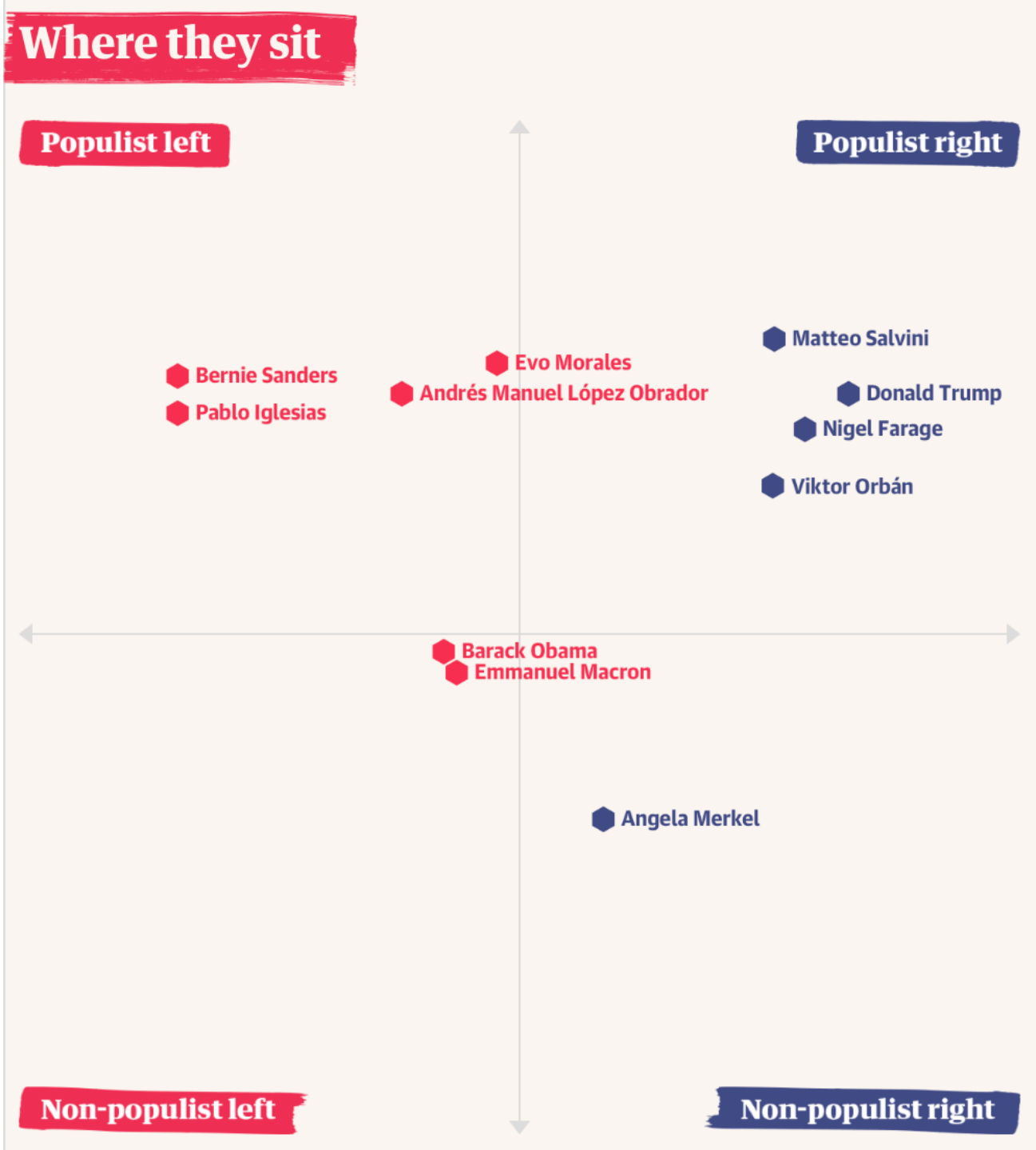
Matteo Salvini  
Donald Trump  
Nigel Farage  
Viktor Orbán

Barack Obama  
Emmanuel Macron

Angela Merkel

Non-populist left

Non-populist right





## Question 7

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## Question 7

**What have  
we learned  
about  
populism?**

- Populism based on idea of a unified people having a general will
- Populism knows no ideological, cultural, or national borders
- Populism thrives on grievance and confrontation
- Populism clashes with liberal democracy

# THE THREAT OF POPULISM

**THANK-YOU FOR LISTENING!**

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