



Who Speaks for “the People”? Placing Canadian Populist Politics in Historical Context

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Populism in Canada Is...

- ◉ Headline News
- ◉ A Political Phenomenon
- ◉ Not Entirely New
- ◉ A Story of the Canadian Party System
- ◉ Not Entirely Old
- ◉ Dangerous but Alluring (For Some)
- ◉ Unavoidable but Navigable

Populism in Canada Is...

Headline News

Populism is alive and well in Canada

THE STAR

Canada is a tinderbox for populism.

MACLEAN'S

**Canada Isn't So Different.
It Could Go Populist Too.**

The New York Times

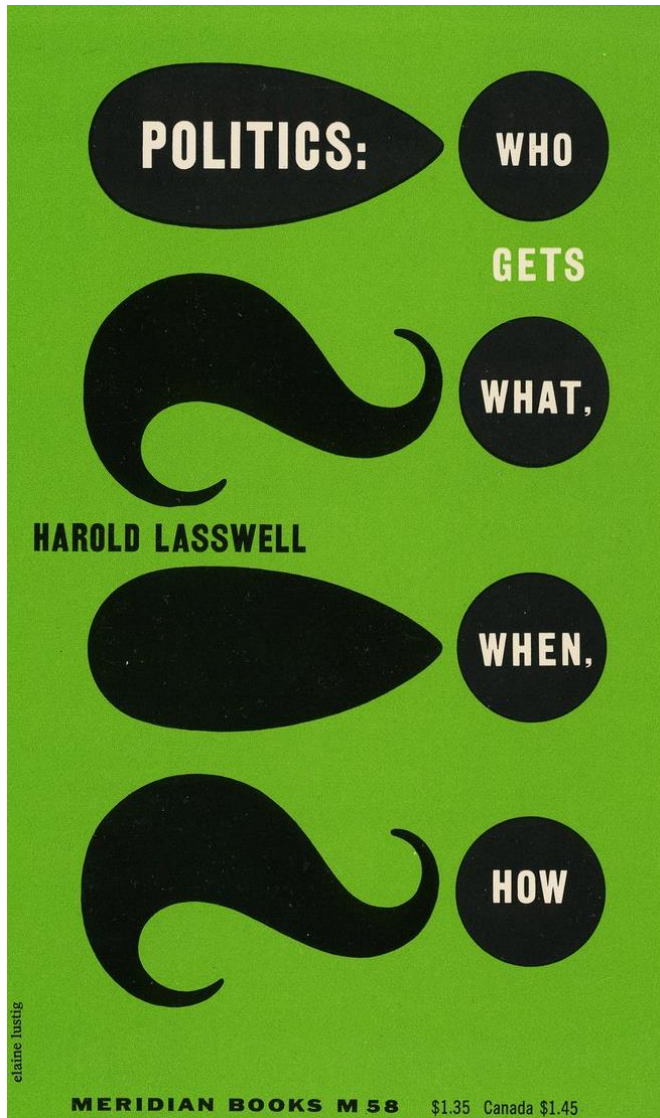
Why Canadians need to wake up about populism

“It has been belittled, dismissed, with most expert opinion falling into two categories: patronizing and sneering. It has been viewed as the problem all on its own with little thought given to what has caused it or what can be done to encourage it to go away.”

Frank Graves and Michael Valpy (*The Toronto Star*, July 10, 2019)

Populism in Canada Is...

A Political Phenomenon



Populism as “an imagined community”

“...because the members ... will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”

(Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 1983, 7)

An imagined community of ordinary people

- Perceived and/or real **exclusion** and **insecurity** – **outsider**
- Identification of a problematic **elite/establishment** – **insider**
- **Shared (but eclectic)** beliefs, proposals, tactics, emotions – **identities**



LA MEUTE

La Meute, c'est le peuple.

...un groupe citoyen...

...croit en la force du nombre...

...contre toute exclusion ou
préférence...fondée sur la race, la couleur, le
sexe, l'orientation sexuelle, la religion, l'origine
ethnique...

...fait la promotion de la laïcité...

...[contre le] multiculturalisme [de] Justin
Trudeau...

...propose une réforme du système politique...

Populism in Canada Is...

Not Entirely New

1880s-1980s

~Political Right

- Anti-Immigrant
- Ku Klux Klan/Fascism
- Social Credit
- Western Alienation

~Political Left

- Farmers
- Labourers
- Social Gospel
- Quebec Nationalists



Populism in Canada Is...

A Story of the Canadian Party System

Populism into Parties

Populism →

- Anti-Immigrant ↔ →
- Ku Klux Klan/Fascism →
- Social Credit →
- Western Alienation →
- Farmers →
- Labourers →
- Social Gospel →
- Quebec Nationalists →

Mainstream Parties

- Conservatives/Liberals
- *** *Marginalized* ***
- Social Credit/Créditistes
- PC/Reform Party/Provinces
- Progressives-PC/CCF-NDP
- CCF-NDP
- CCF-NDP
- Parti/Bloc Québécois

Robert Michels' Iron Law of Oligarchy

“It is organization
which gives birth to the domination
of the elected over the electors,
of the mandatories over the mandators,
of the delegates over the delegators.
Who says organization, says oligarchy.”

Political Parties (1911, 365)

From Reform to Conservative



“...the [Harper] government is autocratic and secretive because it reflects the personality and world view of the prime minister. With Harper and his administration, what you don't see is what you get.”

John Ibbitson, *Stephen Harper*
(2015, 259)



Populism in Canada Is...

Not Entirely Old

The Context of Populism Today

- *Decline of Deference* (Neil Nevitte, 1996)
 - Rising expectations of/constraints on political institutions
 - Empowered Provincial Governments
 - Empowered Cultural Minorities
 - Shrinking Middle Class
 - Social Media
 - The Age of Rage

Yellow Vests Canada

Facebook Page: "...to protest the CARBON TAX, Build That Pipeline and Stand Against **the Treason of our country's politicians** who have the audacity to sell out OUR country's sovereignty over to the Globalist UN and their **Tyrannical policies...**

We are Canadian Patriots who refuse to allow this country to walk down the **path of Tyranny**. God Bless."

Populism in Canada Is...

Dangerous but Alluring (For Some)

Alluring

- Provides Individuals with: Explanations, Community, Empowerment

BUT POPULISM IS ALSO ELITE-DRIVEN

- Provides Politicians/Public Leaders with: Political Resources and Opportunities
- Especially Problematic for Political Right

Harper's Somewheres/Anywheres

“I see the spectrum realigning [of] populism on one extreme, elitism on the other... A revolt of the mass of the people who don't identify with the views of big institutions, be they governments, or corporations, or media, or entertainment industry, representing the mass of the people challenging established assumptions about globalization, immigration, markets, trade, etc.”

Stephen Harper, Interview (2018)

(<https://globalnews.ca/news/4558026/rage-against-the-elite-a-primer-on-populism-in-canada/>)

Conservative Party and Populism

“party of the pessimistic and financially insecure”**

- More male (except for seniors)
- More self-declared working class
 - Fewer university-educated
- More concerned about immigrants and visible minorities
- **BUT** also more self-declared upper class

** <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2019/07/10/why-canadians-need-to-wake-up-about-populism.html>



Populism in Canada Is...

Unavoidable but Navigable

Limits to Populism in Canada

- Canadian Liberalism
 - Electoral System
- Time and Geography (Immigration)
 - Faith in Political Institutions

Faith in Political Institutions

Measures of Political Discontent	2014	2019
Satisfied with how democracy works	65%	75% ↑
Trust MPs to do what's right	40%	51% ↑
Trust parties to do what's right	42%	45% ↑
Satisfied with how MPs do their jobs	46%	53% ↑
Satisfied with how parties do their jobs	42%	48% ↑

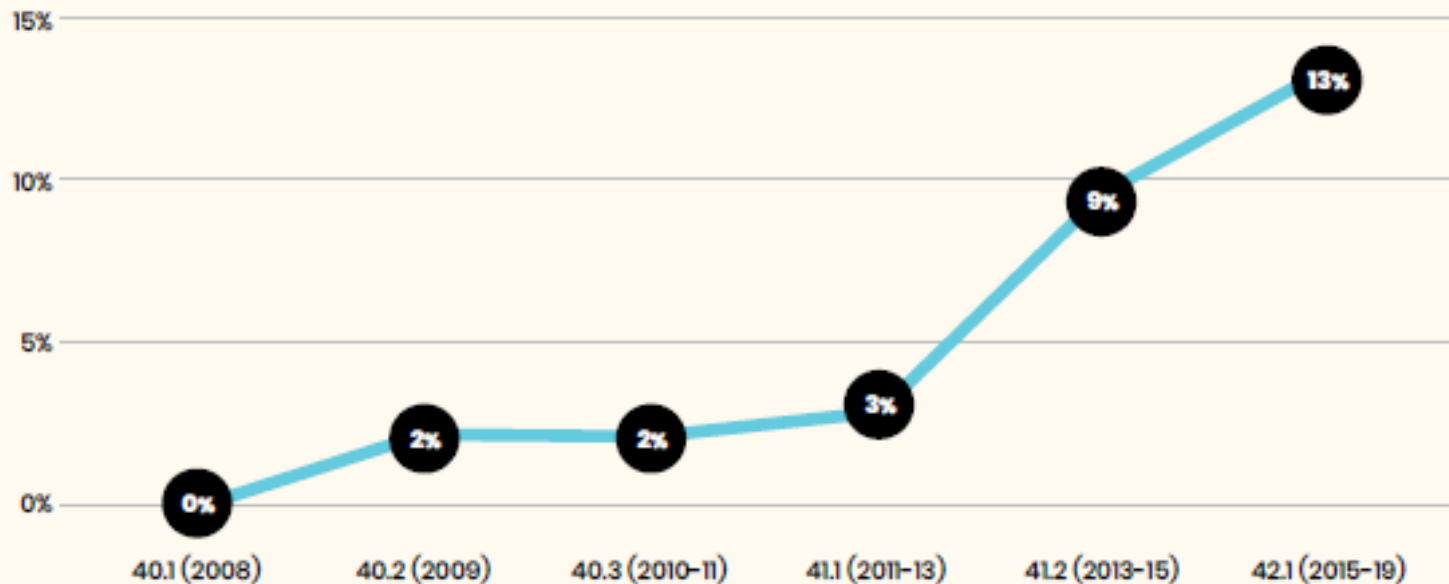
https://www.samaracanada.com/docs/default-source/reports/don't-blame-'the-people'-by-the-samara-centre-for-democracy.pdf?sfvrsn=188c042f_4

Navigating Populism

- *La longue durée* [social-cultural]
 - Economic Dislocation Key
 - Groups and Individuals
 - (Social) Media
 - **Political Parties**

Political Party Responsibilities

Percentage of sitting days in which an MP complains about "elites",
by parliamentary session



https://www.samaracanada.com/docs/default-source/reports/don't-blame-'the-people'-by-the-samara-centre-for-democracy.pdf?sfvrsn=188c042f_4

“Populism is more like the symptom of a disease in the heart of democracy, attempting to heal itself, with potentially lethal side effects.”

Rick Salutin (*The Toronto Star*, March 9, 2018)

Thank you

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