



Introduction: Populism, Political Communication and Performative Leadership in International Politics

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Who speaks for ‘the people’? Populists across the globe have mobilised this question to attack liberal institutions, political opponents, and the democratic process itself, communicating a political reality in which globalist elites have allegedly betrayed the sovereign will of the popular community. The recent ‘surge’ (Mudde, 2016) or ‘wave’ (Aslanidis, 2016) of populism around the world has encompassed electorally successful right-wing populist leaders in the Northern Hemisphere such as Donald Trump,

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Boris Johnson, Marine Le Pen, Jaroslav Kaczyński, Recep Erdoğan, and Victor Orbán, who have advanced nationalist, exclusionary, protectionist and Eurosceptic political agendas. In parallel, left-wing populists in Greece, Spain and Bolivia have attracted voters disillusioned with neoliberal economic policies and existing representational mechanisms of liberal democracy with anti-elitist and anti-globalist platforms. In the Southern Hemisphere, Narendra Modi, Jair Bolsonaro and Yoweri Museveni are oft-cited examples of contemporary populist leaders who have enjoyed continued electoral success with agendas promoting ethnocultural and religious-Nationalist slogans in post-colonial contexts. Prior analyses of these populists' electoral success and political leadership have usually focused on the ideas, ideologies and strategies populism encompasses, especially in the domestic political arena.

The contributions in this volume examine the intersections of populist political communication, performative leadership, and international politics which lie at the centre of the contemporary revolt against the status quo in global affairs. This volume therefore centres its analysis on the global, transnational and international dimensions of populist politics, while engaging with populism's various communicative, discursive, and performative aspects and manifestations. The contributions accordingly focus on the use of strategic communication, political rhetoric, identity narratives, and a wide range of other discursive and media performances by contemporary populist leaders, in particular in the context of foreign policy and international politics, as well as their reception by international and domestic audiences. Collectively, this volume suggests that populist communication deeply and lastingly affects the processes, practices and outcomes of and international politics by reframing the relationship of domestic audiences, political establishments and international actors as a conceptual antagonism between the forgotten 'people' and the hostile 'elite'.

This populist communication advances policy agendas that challenge a post-World War II international order defined by liberal internationalism, multilateralism and institutionalised cooperation. It also has the potential to transform the making of foreign policy and the conduct of international politics. Indeed, the contributions illustrate how the antagonistic core logic of populism manifests as a particular leadership style in contemporary international politics, how it informs strategies of voter mobilisation and policy legitimisation in a global context, and what impact

populist rhetoric, performances and styles have on policies and practices in the realms of security, global health, economics and immigration.

This introduction proceeds in four steps: we start by situating this volume in the relevant academic literature, spanning populism studies, political communication, International Relations, and adjacent fields of study and explaining its overall aim and contribution to said literature. We then define key concepts that have guided our contributors in their examination of populist communication, performative leadership and international politics, and sketch some guiding assumptions on the relationship between populist actors, communication, audiences and policy impact. Next, we outline the structure and content of the volume and provide a brief summary of individual chapters, which have been organised into two parts, with part 1 examining the global interaction of populist leadership styles and communication, and how they manifest in individual decision-making processes and policy outcomes, and part 2 taking a look at the structural impact on international politics and how populism affects concepts of international order and established norms and institutions in trade, immigration, security and diplomacy on the macro-level. Finally, we summarise our findings and discuss their analytical and practical implications for the understanding of the international, performative and communicative dimensions of global populism.

SITUATING OUR APPROACH IN EXISTING SCHOLARSHIP

The global ‘return’ of populism has generated much academic interest among political scientists, which has significantly advanced our understanding particularly of populism’s domestic manifestations and its practical policy impacts. Scholars of domestic and comparative politics have explored at length political ideologies and socio-cultural contexts (Mudde, 2004), the electoral politics of populist parties (Meijers & Zaslove, 2021), the interests and values of populist voters (Akkerman et al., 2014), questions of voter mobilisation and populist political strategy (Jansen, 2011; Roberts, 2015), and the discursive importance of populist leaders (Hawkins, 2009; Weyland, 2001). Much of this research has tended to focus on populist movements and party-political systems in Latin and North America as well as Western Europe (de la Torre, 2015; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012).

Scholars of populism and political communication have long pointed out the ways in which electoral politics and populist rhetoric intersect to

produce populist styles of interlocution, transgression and performance (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Lacatus, 2019; McDonnell & Ondelli, 2022; Meibauer, 2021; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011). This in turn contributes to, for instance, polarisation, distrust, and even violence, and may undermine the functioning of democratic institutions and societies. Populist communication may also have positive effects, such as increasing political participation and including marginalised groups into the political process by (re) integrating previously excluded constituencies. However, liberal features, such as institutional independence of the judiciary or constitutional checks and balances are negatively affected by the concentration of executive power legitimated through populism's homogenised articulation of the will of the people (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012). Increasingly, this scholarship has turned to study not only the discursive and communicative, but also the affective dimensions of populist rhetoric (Schumacher et al., 2022).

Scholars of International Relations have more recently started to explore how populist leaders influence foreign policy and international outcomes once they have taken office or become part of coalition governments (Chryssogelos, 2017; Plagemann & Destradi, 2019; Spandler & Söderbaum, 2023; Stengel et al., 2019; Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017; Wajner, 2021). Empirically, this scholarship tends to focus on practical outcomes and behavioural patterns, e.g. particular trade or security policies, and their origin in populist ideas, ideologies, and politics (such as authoritarian and illiberal models of governance), including increasingly in the Global South (Plagemann et al., 2022; Wojczewski, 2019). The interest here has been twofold: on individual foreign policy outcomes of populist leaders, movements, and parties, as well as on the systemic impact of right-wing and left-wing populism on the political legitimacy and functional integrity of globalisation, international organisations and the liberal international order at large (Chryssogelos, 2020; Lacatus & Meibauer, 2021, 2022; Löffmann, 2022a; Spandler & Söderbaum, 2023; Wojczewski, 2019). The significance of communication, rhetoric, language and discourse for understanding the global rise of populism has similarly attracted growing scholarly attention. While populist discourses have frequently informed previous analyses in terms of providing the empirical material for analyses into populists' ideas and policies, they have now come to the fore in terms of conceptual and theoretical focus. In the discipline of International Relations, this holds especially for research on the intersection between populist narratives and ontological security (Fermor & Holland, 2020;

Homolar & Löffmann, 2021; Lacatus, 2021; Löffmann, 2019, 2022b; Steele & Homolar, 2019).

However, a systematic comparative exploration of populist communication and its implications for international politics is still missing. Our existing understanding of the significance of populist communication, performances of political leadership and authority, political rhetoric, and discourse in relation to processes and outcomes of international politics has remained limited. This is especially true if we consider the extent to which populism is not merely a performative spectacle to lure in voters and amplify grievances, but also a force to remake policies and effect structural change in the international system. This edited volume aims to address this gap in the academic literature by interrogating the intersection of populist communication, performative leadership and international politics. It explores the mechanisms and dynamics connecting these conceptual fields by drawing from scholarship in International Relations, political communication, political psychology and adjacent fields in political science, and by offering a wide range of empirical examples from contemporary populist leaders, movements and parties around the world. The volume therefore also expands the scope of empirical exploration in International Relations, which often prioritises the study of populism in the Western context.

SHARED CONCEPTS AND ASSUMPTIONS

All contributions to this volume start from shared concepts and assumptions that serve as analytical anchors. For one, we understand *populism* as a set of interlocking discourses in politics, media and society constructed around a central political antagonism between the idealised will of an imaginary ‘true people’ and a corrupt ‘elite’ (Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2017). Populists claim to promote the interest of the people by curbing a dangerous Other who is a threat to the people’s sovereignty. They challenge the status quo, give voice to the collective will, and promise a political order that resonates with the longings and aspirations of the true ‘people’ (Moffitt, 2016; Rooduijn, 2014). Populists enact democratic politics not as grand clashes of complex political ideologies but as instinctive battles with elites for rights, voice and legitimacy (Sorensen, 2021). As contributions to this volume show, populism follows a similar logic in non-democratic political settings, even as the politics it speaks is to a different ‘people’ and opposes a different type of political elite. Populists may

reinforce existing autocratic governments, but also conjure a different view of the ‘people’, giving voice to the suppressed desire to break away from autocratic rule. In either case, populists lend political significance to particular narratives, symbols, and myths that serve their electoral goals, resonating with voters at an emotional level, e.g. by evoking nostalgia for an imagined past (Browning, 2019; Kinnvall, 2019; Menke & Wulf, 2021; Schumacher et al., 2022). This is already suggestive of the central role of political communication to the study of populism.

Populist communication concerns the language, deliberation and discursive performance of populist ideas, as well as how these discourses are translated between different interlocutors, including populist leaders, followers, voters, broadcast and social media and other audiences, both domestically and internationally (Condor et al., 2013; Jamieson et al., 2017; Lacatus, 2019, 2021; Lacatus & Meibauer, 2021, 2022). Communication is the ‘rocket fuel’ of populist politics (Sorensen, 2021). Populists around the world and across the political spectrum evoke images of polarised elites and people, giving voice to otherwise unspoken—or ignored, or unheard—calls for morality, authenticity and responsiveness in representative politics. In doing so, populist communication simultaneously creates a space for representing this ‘silent majority’ (Canovan, 1999, p. 5) and actively contributes to the production of its identity. In identifying establishment failure and linking the existence of a corrupt elite to wider socio-economic and socio-cultural anxieties and insecurities, populist performances and discourses simultaneously emphasise dramatisation, personalisation, emotionalisation, and conflict in their antagonistic framing of policy issues and representation of international politics (Wodak, 2015).

The interrogation of populist dynamics therefore necessarily involves studying the language, rhetoric and discursive *performance of populist leaders* (in comparison and contrast to other political actors), as well the wider communicative production and contestation of populist political ideas and populist meaning-making. Kissas (2020, p. 270) argues that ‘the performative elements of communication [...] are to be taken not as mere epiphenomena of political activity but as the very means of doing politics and acting politically’. This concerns what has been labelled the populist style (Moffitt, 2016; Ostiguy, 2017), i.e. a distinct, combined repertoire of settings, aesthetics, theatricality, rhetoric, and affect (Aiolfi, 2022; Kurylo, 2022; Widmann, 2021), which appears in spoken word, text and other visual or auditory information, both in formal political deliberation

as well as in informal settings, offline as well as (increasingly) online. For example, populists are often argued to use a rhetorical style that is direct, intimate, simple, and indelicate (Bischof & Senninger, 2018; Bonikowski & Gidron, 2016), though notable differences persist due to, e.g. personal preferences and abilities, cultural contexts, societal norms, or party-political positions (Ekström et al., 2018; Maurer & Diehl, 2020; McDonnell & Ondelli, 2022). Similarly, the discursive contexts and conditions of political communication matter. For example, populist use of social media platforms, and the reception of populist political communication online has recently attracted considerable interest (Finlayson, 2022; Lacatus, 2021; Sorensen, 2018). Crucially, scholarship on populist styles and discourses has highlighted the performativity of such political communication, for instance with regard to strategic transgression, and a focus on concepts such as deception, authenticity, charisma, demagoguery and distinctly populist ‘leadership’ (Aiolfi, 2022; Fouquet & Brummer, 2023; Lacatus & Meibauer, 2022; Meibauer, 2021; Moffitt, 2016; Moraes, 2022).

Inevitably, populist communication and performative leadership interlink with *international politics*. By *international politics*, we mean the processes by which different actors, including states, international organisations, and non-state actors, interact at global, regional or trans-border levels. That international politics connects with populist communication is most obvious where international political issues influence populist narratives of the Other, e.g. regarding refugees, which can be leveraged for electoral gain, and which are aimed at ontological security needs of various international and domestic audiences (Homolar & Löffmann, 2021; Kurylo, 2022; Löffmann, 2022b). Populists (re)imagine the international sphere as a source of profound material and ontological insecurity for the ‘true people’ and blame the decline and existential crisis of the nation on the discredited ‘globalist’ policies and ideologies of a corrupt cosmopolitan elite and its pursuit of multilateralism, trade liberalisation and open borders (Caiani & Graziano, 2019; Moffitt, 2015; Rooduijn, 2014; Stavrakakis et al., 2017). From these multiple and multiplying crises, the populist leader and/or party offers saving, including by re-modelling and practising international politics in a distinctly populist mould (Maher et al., 2022).

The international dimension is thus central to the way populists legitimate their claim to power and authority. They claim to speak for those who have lost faith in the economic promises of globalisation, who resent unaccountable transnational elites and technocratic governance, and who

are disillusioned with the liberal establishment's discredited 'globalist' policies and ideologies, from cosmopolitanism, to international organisations or European integration and multilateralism (Anastasiou, 2019; Beeman, 2018; Casaroes & Farias, 2021; Freedon, 2017; Müller, 2017). A majority of populism scholars cite the eradication of heterogeneity and pronounced hostility towards pluralism in populism's articulation of a homogenised 'will of the people' as inherently anti-liberal. Nationalist populists ranging from Donald Trump to Viktor Orbán and Jair Bolsonaro raise the spectre of global democratic erosion towards far-right authoritarianism and even fascism, and thereby a wider undermining of liberal international order (Mudde, 2019; Stanley, 2018; also: Casaroes & Farias, 2021). Political theorists like Laclau (2005) and Mouffe (2018), on the other hand, award left-wing populism and associated groups like the Spanish Podemos or Syriza in Greece a positive, emancipatory-progressive quality for highlighting genuine socio-political and socio-economic grievances in society and responding to the global crisis of legitimacy of contemporary liberal democracy. Progressive populism is seen here as necessary democratic corrective to a neoliberal centrist consensus and the depoliticisation and disempowerment of societies through technocratic transnational governance. What unites these competing perspectives, however, is that they characterise populism as a relatively flexible political mode and discursive logic. Populist communication adapts to the particularities of different national contexts, including both specific grievances, anxieties, and resentments, but also electoral or institutional constraints. For example, populist leaders have shown considerable adaptability and even willingness to compromise internationally, e.g. regarding international organisations (Spandler & Söderbaum, 2023) or trade and investment (Morales, 2022).

Where previous scholarship has highlighted similarities and interconnections between how different populist politics react to international political issues across different countries (e.g. how global, regional and transborder issues are imagined, debated and used domestically for electoral gain), we argue that *the impact that populist communication has on international politics* is evident in two main aspects: (1) in the translation of domestic populist discourses into foreign policies and decision-making processes. This holds true across borders, in the case of different populist leaders, parties and movements. More specifically, the impact of populist communication on foreign policymaking concerns when and how states and other actors formulate responses and policies regarding, e.g.

migration, global health, climate change, trade or war. (2) Populist communication and populist performative leadership also affect key dynamics of international politics, from resistance against institutionalised multilateralism to opposition to free trade. They may even change the nature of international politics and influence how we may conceive of its core concepts, such as diplomacy, cooperation and order. This concerns, e.g. the practice of diplomatic negotiations now faced with populist transgression.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE VOLUME

Contributions to this volume investigate different facets of the roles that populist communication and performative leadership play in shaping international politics. In particular, our volume explores the transformative impact of populism on two principal dimensions of international politics. On the one hand, populist rhetoric and performative leadership in the domain of Domestic politics shapes the national governments' conduct of foreign policy both in the Global South and Global North, employing different mechanisms of influence depending on the specificities of each national context. On the other hand, populism can alter the fabric of international politics more generally. This concerns core practices and processes of international politics such as diplomacy or trade. Mirroring this logic of influence, the contributions to this volume have been organised accordingly into two parts: (1) the interrelation of populist communication, performative leadership and the foreign policies of populist leaders, parties and movements across the Global North and South; and (2) the impact of populist communication and performative leadership on international processes and outcomes.

PART I: POPULIST COMMUNICATION, LEADERSHIP AND FOREIGN POLICY IN GLOBAL CONTEXT

Populist communication about foreign policy can be used strategically to advance different types of domestic leadership around the world. Depending on domestic contexts, varying conceptualisations of 'the people' can be imbued with both ideological and normative value. As *Linda Bos*, *Frederic Hopp* and *Penelope Sheets* show, populist political leaders perceive a moral obligation to place 'the people's' interests above all else,

including when they conduct international politics. In their comparative study of populist and non-populist parties in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, they find that communication on foreign policy issues lends itself well to moralisation, more than most other policy domains. While populist parties do not moralise foreign policy statements more, the authors demonstrate that it is essential to understand the differences between populist and non-populist leaders in the use of moralisation for strategic purposes, like building coalitions or mobilising support on morally salient issues such as humanitarian aid or climate change.

The strategic use of populist rhetoric about foreign policy in electoral campaigns in the West has been studied extensively. However, our understanding of the rhetorical and ideological machinations of populist candidates in the Global South is comparatively much more limited, with studies of African leaders being virtually non-existent. In addressing this gap, *Corina Lacatus* investigates the use of populist electoral rhetoric in a competitive autocratic setting, studying the populist communication of two political leaders—Museveni and Wine—opposing one another in Uganda’s most recent election in January 2022. Lacatus argues that, contrary to our expectations based on existing research, our understanding of the intersection between populist communication and ideological distinctions between right-wing and left-wing politics is insufficient for understanding the complex electoral realities of competitive autocratic regimes in the Global South, particularly in an African context. In Uganda’s most recent election, the two leaders make strategic use of foreign policy discourse about foreign aid and international development funding for radically different electoral purposes—Museveni aims to continue having Western support to advance his longstanding rule; Wine critiques Western support for Museveni, calls for Western support to overthrow his regime and instead support Wine’s candidacy to ultimately instate true democratic rule in Uganda.

Perhaps paradoxically, populist leaders can claim to advance the best interest of ‘the people’ to serve diverging political aims—this rhetorical position (sometimes advanced by the same populist party or leader or by different leaders/parties in the same election) can sometimes justify the continuity of existing political platforms and, at other times, it can propel new foreign policy practices which break with the existing establishment. As *David Cadier* shows in his chapter, populist practices shape foreign policymaking by promoting certain representations of Self and Others and by performing a rupture with the technocratic establishment. Cadier

discusses the Polish populist right-wing Law and Justice party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*—PiS). While in some areas of foreign policy, the PiS government has directly engaged with Poland's foreign policy tradition, either reinforcing it or contesting it, its reliance on populist stylistic performances as well as the marginalisation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ultimately fed transgressions of diplomatic norms and diplomatic incidents.

In his chapter, *Federico Petris* argues that, to understand populist foreign policy, one needs to focus not on its substantive content, but rather on its single oppositional discursive logic. More specifically, as the analysis of the Northern League's early separatist rhetoric shows, the influence of populist discourse on foreign policy is not a substantive ideology resulting from the linear transposition of the traditional 'people vs elite' dichotomy. Rather than forcing foreign policy into a variable Self-Other logic, the articulations of the Other are informed by the particular policy field at hand, ultimately creating the grounds for contradictory positions held by populist parties in international policy arenas.

In a Latin American context, *Consuelo Thiers and Leslie Wehner* find that left-wing and right-wing populist leaders in Latin America differ considerably in their political attitudes, both compared to mainstream leaders as well as compared to each other. In general, populist leaders tend to promote expressions of non-cooperation and the use of threats as a means of persuasion in international fora, while at the same time, they are willing to shift to cooperative strategies where it suits their agenda. More specifically, left-leaning populist leaders also share in their speeches a pessimistic assessment of the international environment, while right-leaning populist leaders share a sense that international politics are predictable more so than either left-leaning populists or mainstream leaders.

Crises have always been central to populist politics, whether these crises are real and external (i.e. a large wave of migration or a humanitarian disaster) and impact on the conduct of foreign policy or these crises are of politicians' own making. Responding to the same crisis created by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, *Fabrizio Coticchia and Bertjan Verbeek* propose a study of the extent to which political leaders might be open to foreign policy change and to belief change in their perspectives on international politics. Analysing the Northern League, the Five Star Movement, and Brothers of Italy—and in the case of two most vocal right-wing populist parties in the Netherlands—the Geert Wilders of the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* and Thierry Baudet of the *Forum voor Democratie*, the authors show that change in foreign policy approach to Russia can occur. Moreover, the

authors find variation in the extent and nature of the change that right-wing populist parties are willing to make. The Dutch parties included in their analysis differ greatly in their response to the Russo-Ukrainian war, while their Italian counterparts all radically changed their previously friendly attitude towards Putin.

In their chapter, *Ole Frahm and Dirk Lehmkuhl* find that thick ideology might indeed be more prevalent in the case of populist parties in decline—in response to a deep crisis, some populist parties in decline might respond by only changing some of their policy approaches opting to hold onto some unpopular policy despite the potentially high electoral costs. The authors take a close look at Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party, finding that, adjusting to this downturn, the party readily discarded some of the most unpopular policies, such as Turkey’s policy of zero problems with the neighbourhood. Surprisingly, however, they chose to uphold a deeply unpopular policy of continuing to host millions of (mostly) Syrian refugees. Frahm and Lehmkuhl contend that this behaviour is motivated by the persistence and centrality of core beliefs to populist leadership, which, in a situation of crisis, come to the fore by way of exclusion.

In their chapter, *Markus Ketola and Pontus Odmalm* argue that, while crises are generally central to the public discourse of radical right populist parties, these parties tend to be more successful at managing and responding to the potential of a crisis rather than to an actual crisis in the context of foreign policy and International Relations. Exploring the response of the Finns Party (*Perussuomalaiset*) and the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*) to their responses to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in early 2022, the authors find that the two parties focus the crisis narrative on a discourse about values, symbols, and ways-of-life, often linking them to a rhetoric of imminent migration crisis as a result of war, and hence evade a discussion of policy-based crisis management. These two Scandinavian parties diverge from the individual saviour narratives found elsewhere in the Global North and emphasise ‘the party’ as the sole saviour of the looming disasters that are further immigration and pooling sovereignty as a defence strategy.

In the final chapter in this section, *Amy Skonieczny and Giorgio Davide Boggio* find that, when faced with a large-scale global crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, a particular type of right-wing populism—‘chauvinistic populism’—can motivate a very divisive, exclusive and ‘bad-mannered’ transgressive form of leadership around the world. The authors show that Presidents Trump and Bolsonaro and Prime Minister Modi

chose not to adapt their tried-and-tested populist rhetoric to a crisis narrative that was otherwise widely used in response to a worldwide health crisis. Instead, they continued to emphasise their transgressive, norm-breaking discursive style aimed at breaking with liberal political norms of public decorum and at contesting democratic values.

PART 2: THE STRUCTURAL IMPACT OF GLOBAL POPULISM IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

The transposition of populist communication and performative leadership via foreign policies can deeply shape and change key practices, processes and outcomes of international politics on the macro-level. This holds especially true for incumbent populist governments, such as Donald Trump's presidency in the United States of America or Narendra Modi's tenure as Prime Minister of India, whose impact extended beyond individual policy decisions and demonstrated the populist potential to engender wider geopolitical and geoeconomic transformations in the international system, from recalibrating relationships between major powers to challenging longstanding alliances and partnerships.

More indirect effects of remaking international politics are possible via populist coalition partners or even populists in opposition that shape how more mainstream governments enact their foreign policies and frame international politics as a source of external threat and insecurity. The shifting of official political rhetoric on diplomacy, trade or immigration can occur via the mainstreaming of populist positions and the reorientation of geostrategic tenets according to more confrontational and antagonistic interpretations of world politics. Alongside and interlinked with these structural shifts are other transformative trends, such as increased polarisation, digitisation, changes in media consumption and demographics, which fuel populist contestation, leadership styles and communication and which have the potential to structurally transform how governments, international organisations and other non-state actors think about, conduct and evaluate international politics. This multidimensional interlinkage between domestic and international politics, between communication, performance, and policymaking, and between national, international, and transnational phenomena may challenge our understanding of populism, particularly how we conceptualise populist communication and leadership styles.

In his contribution, *Théo Aiolfi* advances a view of populism as a political style, an open-ended repertoire of performances of identity, transgression and crisis. He focuses in particular on performances of identity in the political communication of politicians embracing populism on the global stage, and details how they might articulate the people, the elites and the leader respectively. Mobilising the people in international contexts can be key to the populist's legitimacy as representing and channelling the common will. Anti-elite rhetoric can be employed to legitimise transgressive practices and a withdrawal from international order. Finally, the populist's performance of people, elite, and Self, to the extent that it permeates, e.g. the conduct of diplomacy, summitry or treaty negotiations, may in turn affect how non-populist leaders, e.g. other heads of state witnessing the respective populist's performance, conceive of international politics. More generally, Aiolfi makes a case for moving beyond state-centrism in International Relations, to better understand the emergence of transnational and even global populism as a political phenomenon that transcends particular national contexts.

Gustav Meibauer asserts that populists often perform a particular type of leadership, whether domestically or abroad: that of the charismatic strongman capable of channelling the people's will, including in appearing on the world stage and representing the people internationally. Such populists have been found to frequently resort to deceptive communication in electoral contexts, e.g. to evade scrutiny, assert dominance or generally transgress the rules of political discourse. Meibauer argues that such deceptive communication is tightly interlinked with populist ideas and performances. To that end, he focuses on the concept of 'populist bullshit' and shows four thematic and conceptual points of connection: (1) populist bullshit as partisan transgression, (2) populist bullshit as a marker of authenticity, (3) populist bullshit as entertainment, (4) populist bullshit as an empty signifier. He discusses the possible effects of populist bullshit on international politics, and points out avenues for further research into the phenomenon. Here, populist bullshit may over time undermine the trust either in interpersonal or institutional relations necessary to sustain key practices of coordination and cooperation in international politics. This erosion may favour the emergence of disorder, to be furthered and exploited by revisionist actors.

Domestic politics and international politics intersect, and influence each other, most clearly in the populist's visits abroad. Whether in office or in opposition, when populist leaders go abroad, they may encounter

circumstances dissimilar to the particular domestic contexts in which they usually communicate or perform. At the same time as their performances abroad may still be carefully scrutinised by relevant audiences at home, they may also need to adapt to foreign contexts—translating ideas, styles and personas to new audiences with different perspectives on foreign policy and international politics. Indeed, complementing the notion of decidedly transnational populist communication and leadership, *Chetan Rana* explores the distinctive populist repertoire employed by the Indian Prime Minister Modi in his engagement with Indian-Americans and Indians living in the United States, which make up the largest Indian community in the diaspora. Modi regularly holds large events during his foreign policy trips, directly engaging the diaspora. In his discourse to these communities, he strategically expands the conception of ‘the people’ to include foreign audiences of voters and supporters. Despite adapting his public communication slightly to the perceived interests and needs of the diaspora, Modi’s discourse remains laced with ethno-populist undertones. This speaks to the persistence of particular communicative and leadership styles as well as underlying political ideas in the populist’s persona. It also raises questions for the host country—at what point does prominently speaking or interacting with diasporas constitute undue foreign influence, given that diaspora members may well be politically active, vote, etc. where they live, rather than where they come from?

Eduardo Ryo Tamaki and Gustavo Venturelli thereby show that the idea of ‘the people’ need not be construed solely domestically, nor limited to specific regional or national characteristics. Rather, it can be successfully developed abroad, during visits to nations with right-wing populist parties in power, and moulded to include distinctly transnational elements. Tamaki and Venturelli show that in his speeches abroad, Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro mobilised far-right populist rhetoric with the purpose of advancing a common international narrative of a singular transnational ‘people’ with a shared identity and opposing a set of common global enemies. Just as the preceding chapter, then, this chapter widens our perspective on the relevant audiences and loci of populist communication. Populism is then a transnational phenomenon not only because it occurs in different places worldwide, but more specifically because it includes specific transnational practices, such as visits abroad. Speeches abroad play out in different contexts, and populists are quite willing to adapt. Concurrently, what populist leaders say abroad is not simply an export product. Instead, it also seems to affect in turn the type of ideas and styles

they may adopt back home, and the policies and behaviours they may turn to when in government.

Diplomacy is arguably the international practice most crucial to sustaining international order and cooperation between states. As such, it is of the utmost importance, both conceptually and empirically, whether how populist leaders and populist-led governments conduct themselves as diplomats and negotiators affects the practice of diplomacy, and in turn wider international order. *Prima facie*, one may expect populists to behave undiplomatically: after all, transgression is key to populist performance. *Sandra Destradi, Johannes Plagemann, Ege Husemoglu, Vihang Junle, Alyssa Santiago and Ronald Schleehauf* explore the extent to which populist governments adopt a more confrontational rhetoric in their diplomatic interactions. Claiming to embody the popular will and embracing a Manichean and moralistic worldview is expected to lead to a more ‘black-and-white’ understanding of and conduct in international politics, as well as a harsher approach to competitors and enemies. They consider four countries in their research—India, Italy, Philippines, and Turkey—and find that, in general, the shift to a populist government led to the expected adoption of a more confrontational rhetoric. However, this behaviour is not consistent over time in all countries, as some populist governments turned much friendlier towards their populist counterparts in other countries. Here, we may see the building blocks of a populist international. Moreover, in moments where voters do not find foreign policy to be of importance, this rhetorical aggression will fade over time. This may be suggestive of the predominantly domestic and electoral orientation of populists in power.

Emmanuelle Blanc turns to the effects such a confrontative and transgressive populist strategy of anti-diplomacy may have on diplomacy and cooperation. She argues that Trump’s personalism, preference for high-level summitry, and transgressive communicative style have all contributed to the weakening of the US professional diplomatic corps. In her chapter, she focuses in particular on the effects of populist communication on transatlantic diplomacy, specifically the ‘everyday’ diplomatic practice of dialogues. She shows that while Trump’s populist rhetoric has changed the substance of transatlantic diplomatic exchanges, it has also triggered defensive responses from various diplomatic actors. She suggests that this demonstrates the resilience of diplomacy as a cooperative international practice in the face of populist challenges. This carefully nuances more alarmist views of the effects of populism on international politics at the

same time as it highlights the necessity to defend existing norms and institutions from transgressive contestation.

Finally, *Alexandra Homolar and Georg Löfflmann* show how right-wing populist actors have constructed a security imaginary around the loss of past national greatness. They conceive of such a humiliation narrative as a key discursive mechanism by which populists can turn more abstract notions of enmity into more concrete and politically consequential sentiments of loss, betrayal and oppression. The authors suggest that this emotive response enables a radical departure from established domestic and international policy norms and problematises policy choices centred on collaboration, dialogue, and peaceful conflict resolution, which normatively underpin the existing international order as well as liberal democracy. The January 6 riot in the United States has thereby underlined the potential of such humiliation narratives of popular victimhood to be exploited by populist actors for the antagonistic mobilisation of voters and the legitimisation of politically motivated violence against core institutions of liberal democracy—such as the peaceful transition of power—framed as hostile and deliberately injuring the ‘true people’. This raises the spectre of growing authoritarianism and further democratic erosion as a result of populist communication and mobilisation against the ‘elite’ both domestically and internationally.

CONCLUSION

The contributions to this volume investigate the effects of populist communication and leadership performances on how states and other actors interact in the international sphere. This is the first volume to theorise the interaction of populist politics, and specifically populist communication, with international politics (and their interrelation with key concepts of the disciplinary field of International Relations). Moreover, the chapters collected in this volume interrogate when and how populist communication affects the foreign policy process and its outcomes. This concerns how international issues are narrated, deliberated and decided upon. It also involves the ways in which populist communication, all the way from specific ‘talking points’ to broader discourses on, e.g. Self and Other, permeate not only top-level leadership, but also wider bureaucracies and non-state foreign policy actors, as well as how other actors may position themselves against it, to influence why, how and when foreign policy is made. This also includes the communicative processes through which

particular foreign policy outcomes and behaviours flow from populist discourse, e.g. regarding protectionist or isolationist tendencies, or more aggressive policies. A more carefully calibrated understanding of the international dimension of populism thereby also requires us to adopt a more nuanced understanding of the conceptual differences and similarities in the political communication and performative leadership of both left-wing and right-wing populists, which our contributors address.

The volume offers a diversity of empirical cases from around the world, in an attempt to widen the scope of research beyond the story of populism in the ‘West’ and to capture its transnational and geopolitical manifestations, ranging from Latin America to Africa and the Asia-Pacific. A broader understanding of populism as a truly global phenomenon is essential given that, despite the dearth of research on some regions, populist politics has been endemic for decades in different parts of the Global South and has often placed international politics and foreign policy (issues like foreign aid, for instance) at its centre. The contributions collected in this volume therefore enhance our understanding of the effects of populist on foreign policy and international politics by adding several case studies on populist communication in the Global South, including the first study (in *International Relations*) on populism in an African country.

This volume’s overarching contribution to the existing scholarship is twofold—first, it adds valuable conceptual and theoretical insights to the fast-growing scholarship on populism, foreign policy, and *International Relations* by highlighting the importance of populist communication and leadership performances and how these populist repertoires interact with the formulation and implementation of foreign policy and the structure of the international system. The things populists say, and how they say them, matter. As the contributions to this volume show, they deeply affect the continued practice and outcomes of diplomacy, trade, security, and international order; if not always in straightforward or expected ways.

Second, this volume makes an important empirical contribution by bringing to the forefront analyses of populist communication across both the Global North and South, and by highlighting the international and transnational dynamics of the communicative and performative populist styles examined by our contributors. Despite populist politics being commonplace across the world, we note a dearth of dedicated research explaining how and why populist communication interlinks with and affects foreign policies and international politics beyond the Americas and Western Europe, and how these populisms compare within and across

cases. The examinations undertaken by the contributions collected in this volume not only challenge a more simplistic understanding of populism as based solely in ideological commitment; collectively, they provide a hitherto overlooked, nuanced and detailed perspective on the global interlinkages of populist political communication, leadership styles, and political practices in contemporary international politics.

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