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JOST HALFMANN

TU Dresden, Institute of Sociology, Germany

THE POLITICAL MEANING AND THRUST OF POPULIST MOVEMENTS

Abstract:

Populist movements are abound in Europe: since the 1990s such movements and parties as Podemos in Spain, the Lega Nord in Italy, the UKIP in England or the Front National in France sprang up and attracted substantial numbers of voters and followers over time. Populist movements and parties claim to speak for the people, they oppose elites in politics and economy and large associations and demand direct democracy. The thesis of the paper is that these movements and parties protest against the perceived erosion of the political status of the people as the legitimate constituent of democratic rule. According to populist views, political and social elites violate the obligation of the implicit contract between elites and the people to pursue the common good of the people in exchange for the people's loyalty to political rule. This loyalty appears to be challenged by perceived corruption, fatal governmental decisions and actions risking the wealth and the security of the nation, among which immigration politics rank highly. Immigration violates this contract because, as populists see it, only the people (that is: the legal and legitimate members of a constituency) should profit from the provisions of the state (welfare, safety, public order). The paper will illustrate this thesis by comparing selected populist movements and parties and reflect on the possible consequences of populism for representative democracy.

Keywords:

populism, protest, common good, immigration