Research Note

Party Politics

Party Politics
2025, Vol. 0(0) 1–8


Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/13540688251327564
journals.sagepub.com/home/ppq
Sage

US governors populism database: Assessing the impact of Donald Trump on state-level discourse

Semir Dzebo and Erin K. Jenne
Central European University, Austria

Levente Littvay
HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences, Budapest, Hungary
CEU Democracy Institute, Budapest, Hungary

Kirk A. Hawkins
Brigham Young University, USA

Olaf van der Veen
Utrecht University, The Netherlands

Abstract
The election of Donald Trump in 2016 has often been characterized as part of a larger populist wave sweeping Western democracies. However, claims about populism's pervasiveness often lack empirical support, particularly at the subnational level. This research note introduces the US Governors Populism Database (USGPD), providing the first quantitative measures of populist rhetoric among state-level officials in the United States. Analyzing 400 speeches from 100 governor terms across all 50 states, we find that a political system with a populist national leader is not necessarily associated with high levels of subnational populism. While Republican governors show higher levels of populist rhetoric than Democrats, this difference predates Trump's presidency and shows no evidence of intensifying following his first election. By providing systematic evidence about populism's presence and diffusion across different levels of government, this study demonstrates how populist rhetoric manifests differently across governmental tiers and contributes to scholarship examining populist discourse in multi-level political systems.

Keywords
American politics, political rhetoric, populism, state governors

Introduction

Scholars and commentators on US politics have often asserted that Trump's election in 2016 (and again now in 2024) was part of a larger wave of populism, especially radical right populism, sweeping across Western democracies (Mudde 2015; Zakaria 2016). However, this argument for the United States, as in other Western democracies, is frequently based on thin evidence, primarily relying on scholars' own assertions of the populism of the chief executive or national party leaders, rather than systematic evidence (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018; Galston 2017; Greven 2016). Even when objective, replicable measures confirm the populism of key national leaders and some of their voters (Akkerman et al., 2014; Hawkins and Littvay 2019; Inglehart and Norris 2016; Jenne et al., 2021), there is so far no quantitative evidence of populist rhetoric among subnational party officials.

In this research note, we provide the first attempt at quantitative measures of populist ideas among U.S. state-level officials, presenting the first version of the US

Paper submitted 8 November 2024; accepted for publication 28 February 2025

Corresponding author:
Semir Dzebo, Doctoral School of Political Science, Public Policy, and International Relations, Central European University, Quellenstraße 51, Wien 1100, Austria.
Email: dzebo_semir@phd.ceu.edu

Governors Populism Database (USGPD). The USGPD is an extension of the Global Populism Database, which measures the populism of national chief executives worldwide through holistic grading of speech samples (Jenne et al., 2021).[1] The results for US governors are comparable to those of the larger GPD due to the use of the same measurement technique and analogous sampling.

We use the USGPD to answer several questions about populism generally and the Trump administration in particular. First, we examine whether having a populist leader at the national level corresponds with high levels of populism at the subnational level, both overall and within the leader's party. Second, we investigate whether Trump's populist rhetoric diffused to the state level quickly, examining whether the populist wave extended beyond prominent national politicians. Finally, we explore whether the Republican governors who provided early endorsements of Trump's presidential nomination bid were more populist than the rest, suggesting strategic alignment between populist messaging across different levels of government.

To be clear, the USGPD can only partially address some of these questions. The sample, which covers two governor terms in each of the 50 US states, provides a mere snapshot of state-level populism at just two moments, before and after the 2016 election. That said, this initial release of the database allows us to draw several important conclusions. First, we find the overall level of populist rhetoric among US governors to be consistent with global patterns, with no appreciable difference between the average level of populism across the US governors and the average level of populism across chief executives of countries around the world. Second, we find no evidence that Trump's presidency increased populism at the state level, at least in the short term. While Republican governors show slightly higher populism scores than Democrats, this difference existed prior to Trump's election. Finally, we find that a small group of early Trump endorsers within the Republican party exhibited significantly higher than average populism scores, suggesting a pre-existing affinity for populist rhetoric among certain GOP governors that may have affected Trump's rise to power. Together these findings challenge assumptions about the pervasiveness of populism in US politics and highlight the importance of examining populist tendencies across different levels of government. Future expansions of the dataset will enable us to speak to the long-term impact of Trump's populism both within the Republican Party and at the state-level. It will also help address the broader question of how long it takes for populism to diffuse across all levels of governance within a polity.

Theoretical framework and research questions

While scholars have increasingly examined populism at the national level, our understanding of its manifestation and diffusion across different tiers of government remains limited. Indeed, the work on populist diffusion is so new that it is difficult to frame our study in terms of theoretically driven hypotheses. Hence, we focus our investigation on three specific questions.

The first question (Q1) is whether the US political system under Trump's populist leadership exhibited high levels of populist rhetoric at the state-level. Studies of subnational populism are scarce and primarily qualitative, focusing on theoretical frameworks (Chou et al., 2022), case studies of specific populist leaders (Kiss et al., 2020; Silver et al., 2020), and the impact of local ties on populist voting behavior (Fitzgerald 2018). Some studies have explored the intersection of populism with subnational governance structures (Drápalová and Wegrich 2021; Paxton 2020) and regional variation influencing populist success (Albertazzi and Zulianello 2021). However, these studies often assume populist tendencies based on party affiliation rather than measuring populist rhetoric directly. No study presents data on state-level officials in the United States.

Our second question (Q2) is whether there is evidence that populism at the national level diffuses to the subnational level, especially across politicians within the same party. While populist diffusion has primarily been studied in cross-national contexts, examining how mainstream parties respond to populist challengers (Rooduijn et al., 2014), recent theoretical advances demonstrate that "context similarity" facilitates ideological diffusion by providing cognitive shortcuts that reduce the costs of adapting populism across contexts (Wiesehomeier et al., 2024). We contend that if populist ideas can diffuse across national borders where contextual differences are more substantial, we should expect even stronger potential for diffusion within a single federal system where political actors share institutional frameworks, media environments, partisan identity, and broad cultural contexts.

The dynamics of American political behavior give reason to believe that populism can diffuse across levels. Voter behavior and party platforms have both nationalized significantly - the correlation between presidential and gubernatorial voting rose from 0.61 in 1990 to 0.88 in 2010, while state party platforms increasingly mirror national positions (Hopkins 2018: 49, 142–168), suggesting conditions conducive to rhetorical diffusion. This nationalization aligns with earlier theoretical work on presidential influence, which suggests that presidents can shape policy priorities and institutional arrangements (Gleiber and Shull 1992; Howell and Lewis 2002; Moe 1985), although less is known about their ability to influence the rhetorical styles of political elites at the subnational level.

Elsewhere in the US politics literature, two potential pathways for such partisan influence have been identified: voter cue-taking and consultant-driven strategy diffusion. Cue-taking occurs when voters follow messaging cues from

leaders they support (Lenz 2012; Zaller 1992). This might incentivize sub-state-level politicians to align their rhetoric with higher-level political figures to maintain voter support. In contrast, consultant-driven strategy diffusion occurs when politicians working with the same consultants, polling firms, and campaign teams employ similar communication strategies across different offices and levels of government (Nyhan and Montgomery 2015). Either way, these mechanisms suggest that a populist president could potentially influence the discourse of ideologically aligned political elites, especially governors from the same party, although we do not know how quickly this diffusion would occur.

A third question (Q3) concerns whether Republican governors who provided early endorsements of Trump's presidential nomination bid exhibited higher levels of populist rhetoric compared to other governors. Here, the theoretical mechanism centers on the strategic significance of early endorsements in presidential primaries, where initial support carries heightened political risk and typically reflects genuine ideological alignment rather than electoral calculation (Burt 2023; Cohen et al., 2008). Unlike later endorsements that often serve tactical positioning goals, early endorsements—particularly for non-establishment candidates like Trump—represent costly signals directed primarily at party activists (Burt 2023: 28–29). The empirical validity of examining such elite-level endorsement patterns is supported by research demonstrating the predictive power of elite endorsements in nomination contests (Dowdle et al., 2016). This relationship between rhetorical style and endorsement timing is particularly relevant for understanding how populist discourse achieves institutional legitimacy within mainstream party structures through strategic elite coalescence.

Data and methods

Examining the relationship between national and subnational populism requires analyzing political discourse across different tiers of government. To that end, we introduce a novel dataset that systematically measures populism in speeches by US governors over recent terms before and after Trump's election. While our analysis focuses on the United States during a specific time period, this case study approach allows us to examine the relationship between national and subnational populist rhetoric in considerable depth within one of the world's most influential federal democracies. The dataset comprises 400 speeches from 100 governor terms, covering two terms for each state. The core variable of interest is the level of populist rhetoric exhibited by governors in a given term. To assess overall levels of state-level populism and partisan differences in populist rhetoric, we compare populism scores across all governors and between political parties. To examine the temporal diffusion of populist rhetoric, we divided governor terms into pre-Trump and post-Trump periods based on specific criteria. To ensure the full extent of the rhetoric is captured, each term had to be completed by the time of coding in November 2020 (or ending in January 2021). We designated the terms occurring entirely before Trump took office in January 2017 "pre-Trump," while the terms overlapping with his presidency from 2017 to 2021 were designated "post-Trump,". This division allows us to compare populism scores before and after Trump's election. Additionally, to examine the potential bottom-up influence of subnational populism on national politics, we analyze the populism scores of governors who provided early endorsements of Trump's presidential campaign.

Given that gubernatorial election schedules are staggered across states, perfectly aligning terms to Trump's pre-/post-presidency timing was not feasible for all cases. The most common periods were 2010- 2014 (Term 1) and 2014-2018 (Term 2). Other combinations were 2011-2015 (Term 1) and 2015-2019 (Term 2) or 2012-2016 (Term 1) and 2016-2020 (Term 2). While not perfectly bisecting Trump's presidency, these windows allowed coding rhetoric immediately preceding and following the pivotal 2016 election. Term periods were divided to satisfy the criteria as closely as possible.[2] In line with the sampling criteria used in the Global Populism Database (GPD), we analyzed four speech types for each governor term: campaign, ribbon-cutting, State of the State address, and a notable famous speech. Selections adhered to specific criteria to ensure representativeness and consistency (see Appendix A). Speeches under 2–3 pages were avoided unless no alternatives existed.

The method used to code the speeches consists of holistic grading developed by Hawkins (2009), a method of human coding that has been validated across multiple projects and is employed by Team Populism in the Global Populism Database (Hawkins et al., 2022; Jenne et al., 2021). Coders assign grades to speeches by evaluating their meaning as a whole rather than breaking them into parts to be evaluated separately and then aggregated. Coders undergo extensive training to identify elements of populist rhetoric based on the ideational definition of populism like anti-elitism, appeals to the unified popular will, and Manichaean worldview (Hawkins 2009; Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2019) by comparing the populism in each speech to the populism in so-called anchor speeches ranging from non-populist to strongly populist exemplars. The training teaches coders to identify high levels of populism as those speeches that consistently claim a unified "will of the people" and valorize the people and its fight against a malevolent, conspiring elite seeking to undermine their will. Coders were instructed to assign lower scores to texts that exhibit these elements intermittently. Speeches that do not include any of these elements, or that only use one element in isolation, received the lowest scores. For instance, a speech with strong pro-

people elements that lacks a reference to evil or exploitative elites would still receive a low score. The resulting scale runs from 0 (no populism) to 2 (high populism) and allows for one decimal place in grading (see full coding rubric in Appendix B).

Our coders were MA students of political science, public policy, or international relations at a European research university taking a course in US politics, and an advanced political science undergraduates at a large US university taking a course on US populism. Each speech was independently coded by two coders, with each coder completing the coding rubric for each speech. Coders were directed to extract quotes that were either populist or pluralist as evidence to support the assigned grade. After the initial coding, coders participated in reconciliation meetings with expert scholars to ensure that there was a common understanding about how to apply the rubric to the speeches across coders. After these meetings, coders had the opportunity to revise their scores based on new insights. The final grade for each speech was the average of the two (potentially revised) coder grades, preserving individual judgment while incorporating expert guidance. For each term, the final grade was the average across the four types of speeches coded.

We assessed coding reliability using two measures: Krippendorff's alpha, which evaluates inter-coder agreement across multiple coders, and Cronbach's alpha, which measures internal consistency. The coding process involved students from two universities, with 82% of the rubrics coded by students at the first university and 18% by students at the second university. After an initial coding phase and a thorough reconciliation process, we achieved high levels of coding reliability (Krippendorff's *alpha* = 0.792; Cronbach's *alpha* = 0.90, 95% CI [0.85, 0.93]), approaching or exceeding recommended thresholds (Krippendorff 2004; Taber 2018).

Results

With governor terms divided into pre-/post-Trump periods and speeches coded for populist content, our dataset enables empirical tests of our questions about the prevalence of populist rhetoric at the subnational level in the US, its temporal diffusion from the national to subnational level, and whether Trump's early gubernatorial endorsers were populists.

System-level and partisan populism (Q1)

Concerning our first question, we find no empirical evidence indicating that state-level political discourse exhibited elevated patterns of populist rhetoric under Trump's presidential tenure during the examined period. The descriptive statistics of our results (Appendix C) reveal that US governors' populist rhetoric aligns closely with global patterns of chief executives' communication. The mean populism score across all governor terms is 0.30 (SD = 0.24), with a median of 0.25 on the 0–2 scale. Seven governor terms received the lowest possible populism score of 0. Only three terms exceeded a score of 1: Louisiana under Jindal (1), Maine under LePage's second term (1.05), and Illinois under Rauner (1.10), the latter being the maximum observed.

In contrast, scores for Trump in office as well as for Trump and other candidates during the 2016 campaign were relatively high. Hawkins and Littvay (2016) coded populist rhetoric among US presidential candidates in the 2016 primaries using the same 0–2 scale. They found that Bernie Sanders scored highest at 1.5, while Donald Trump and Ted Cruz each scored 0.8, and Hillary Clinton scored 0.2. Trump's scores (visible in Figure 1) remained at 0.8 during his presidency.

Examining scores by party affiliation only slightly modifies this picture. Welch's t test indicates higher populism scores for Republican governors (M = 0.35, SD = 0.24) compared to Democrats (M = 0.21, SD = 0.22); t (94.88) = 3.32, p = .001, 95% CI [0.06, 0.23].[3] While this partisan difference is statistically significant, it is not very large, and the Republican governors still show much lower levels of populism than Trump during this period.

Interestingly, while low in comparison to Trump and some presidential candidates, the US governors reflect the global average of chief executives as well as that of recent US presidents. If we consider all chief executives around the world in the Global Populism Database (v 2.0), the average is 0.4—very close to the average for US governors. Likewise, Barack Obama's populism score reached only 0.3 (during his second term), while George W. Bush's highest score (first term) was 0.2 (Jenne et al., 2021). During his campaign, Joseph Biden received just 0.4 (Lindsay and Galán 2021).

Temporal diffusion of populist rhetoric (Q2)

Our second question asks whether populist rhetoric diffuses to the subnational level following the election of a populist national leader. Of course, given the overall levels of populism for US governors, we might not expect there to be any diffusion, but these averages did not break down the results for before and after Trump's election. To do so, we compared mean populism scores for pre-Trump terms (before 2017) versus post-Trump terms using Welch's unequal variances t test. The results revealed no statistically significant difference (t (97.96) = 0.99, p = .32, 95% CI [−0.05, 0.14]), with pre-Trump terms actually scoring slightly

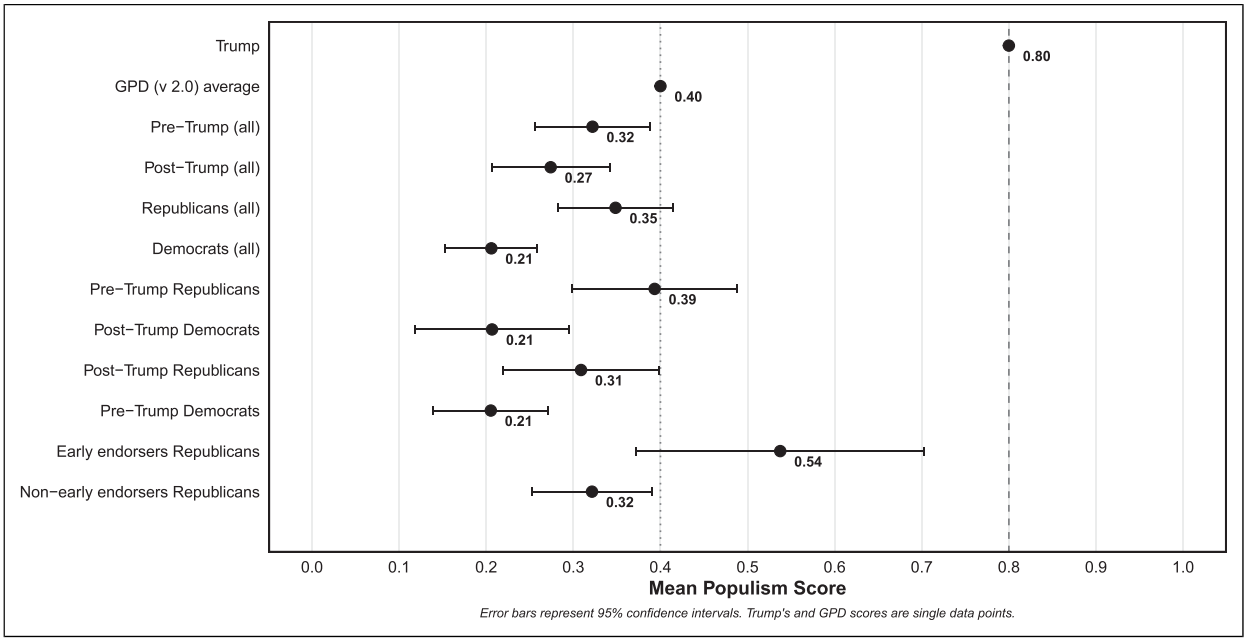

Figure 1. Populism scores of US governors before and after Trump's election.

higher (M = 0.32, SD = 0.25) than post-Trump terms (M = 0.27, SD = 0.23). As an additional robustness check, we isolated 12 states where the same person served both terms in the analysis. This subset analysis also showed no significant difference (t (45.50) = 0.97, p = .34, 95% CI [−0.07, 0.20]), with pre-Trump terms again scoring slightly higher (M = 0.32) than post-Trump terms (M = 0.25). Thus, there is no evidence of diffusion of Trump's populist rhetoric to the state level, at least over the short term.

Early Trump endorsers and populist rhetoric (Q3)

To address our third question as to whether Republican governors who provided early endorsements of Trump's presidential nomination bid exhibited higher levels of populist rhetoric than other governors, we examined a group of early Trump endorsers. This group comprises Republican governors who endorsed Trump before he was declared the presumptive Republican nominee by RNC Chairman on May 3, 2016, including LePage's two terms as Governor of Maine, Christie's two terms in New Jersey, Scott's two terms in Florida, Brewer's term in Arizona, and McMaster's term in South Carolina, totaling eight governor terms that met this criteria. Here we find our first evidence of a link between populism at the state and national levels. This group of early endorsers exhibited significantly higher populism scores (M = 0.54, SD = 0.29) as compared to other Republicans (M = 0.32, SD = 0.23); Welch's t (9.58) = 2.37, p = .04, 95% CI [0.01, 0.42]. This higher level of populist rhetoric among early supporters suggests that pre-existing pockets of local-level populism may have provided a launching pad of support for Trump's presidential campaign. Of course, these data are only correlational, and we would need other methodological approaches to identify whether the populism of these governors played a role in their decision to endorse Trump. Equally important would be evidence that their populism emboldened Trump and his advisors to use more populism in his 2016 presidential campaign.

Conclusion

Our study set out to investigate three key questions: whether a political system with a populist leader exhibits high levels of populism at the subnational level, whether populist rhetoric diffuses from national to subnational level after a populist leader's election, and whether higher levels of pre-existing populist rhetoric among subnational party officials facilitate the rise of a national populist leader. While our US Governors Populism Database (USGPD) provides only brief time series test in one polity, it offers a valuable initial examination of these questions.

Our findings reveal consistently low levels of populism at the subnational level, providing a negative answer to our first question about whether populist national leadership corresponds to high levels of subnational populism, at least in the United States. While we find a statistically significant partisan difference, with Republican governors showing

higher levels than Democrats, this difference was modest and predated Trump's presidency. It also showed no signs of intensifying during his term - thus also addressing our second question about diffusion. This suggests that the relationship between national and state-level populism is more complex than simple top-down diffusion. Importantly, even during a period of potentially heightened populist sensibilities in the United States, when major populist candidates from both parties ran in the primaries, populism remained relatively low in governors' rhetoric. We might attribute this pattern to several factors. First, state politics' exhibits an inherently pragmatic nature. As Reagan noted, it operates "closer to the people" (Songer 1984: 387), primarily through its emphasis on constituent services and infrastructure needs. Second, research documents a clear trend of diminishing citizen engagement with state politics compared to national political affairs (Bachner and Ginsberg 2020). Finally, the reduced electoral competitiveness in many states due to geographic sorting may limit the utility of populist appeals in increasingly homogeneous state political environments (Bishop, 2008).

Regarding our third question, we found early Trump endorsers exhibited significantly higher populism scores compared to other Republican governors. This finding supports other evidence that whatever early institutional support Trump had in 2016 was primarily driven by ideological resonance with his populist messaging rather than traditional party dynamics (Albert and Barney 2019: 1249). However, this group of populist governors was relatively small, aligning with findings at the mass level that populism played a secondary role in his 2016 election, with other factors such as issue positions and partisan identity playing more significant roles (Hawkins and Littvay 2019: 69). It is important to note that we cannot determine if populism increased in response to Trump's presidency after our study period. The populist landscape at the subnational level may have shifted by the time that he ran again, at the time of the writing of this article in 2024, or it may still be low. Our dataset provides a baseline for future research to track these potential long-term changes.

In conclusion, our study offers an in-depth picture of populism's presence and influence at the subnational level in the United States. By providing the first quantitative measure of populist discourse among US governors, our research lays the groundwork for more comprehensive analyses of the diffusion of populist rhetoric across different levels of government. Future research can build on this foundation to explore long-term trends, regional variations, and the interplay between national and local political discourse. These studies could examine populist tendencies across diverse federal systems, comparing decentralized two-party systems like the U.S. with more fragmented structures that have distinct federal and regional parties. Such comparative work would further test and refine the questions we have examined here.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers whose valuable feedback helped strenghten this manuscript. We also thank the participants in the American Politics and Foreign Policy course at CEU (2020) and the POLI 319R Populism in the US course at BYU (2021) for their work in coding the speeches.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors would like to thank the Central European University Institute for Advanced Study (CEU IAS) and Central European University Foundation, Budapest (CEU BPF) for supporting this research.Van der Veen's research has been partly funded by the European Union (ERC Consolidator grant, RADIUNCE, #101043543). Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

ORCID iDs

Semir Dzebo https://orcid.org/0009-0001-1769-9896
Erin K. Jenne https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1028-8055
Levente Littvay https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2022-6886
Kirk A. Hawkins https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7578-7387
Olaf van der Veen https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5454-2386

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. The replication materials that support the findings of this study are openly available in Harvard Dataverse at https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/QNQL2Z
2. For terms straddling Trump's inauguration (e.g., 2015–2019), coders were instructed to select post-inauguration speeches when available.
3. This divide predates Trump's presidency. A one-way ANOVA with Tukey's post-hoc test showed a significant difference only between Republican governors pre-Trump (M = 0.39, SD = 0.26) and Democratic governors pre-Trump (M = 0.21, SD = 0.22), with a mean difference of 0.19 (p = 0.04).

References

Akkerman A, Mudde C and Zaslove A (2014) How populist are the people? Measuring populist attitudes in voters. *Comparative Political Studies* 47(9): 1324–1353.

Albert Z and Barney DJ (2019) The party reacts: the strategic nature of endorsementsof Donald Trump. *American Politics Research* 47(6): 1239–1258.

Albertazzi D and Zulianello M (2021) Populist electoral competition in Italy: the impact of sub-national contextual factors. *Contemporary Italian Politics* 13(1): 4–30.

Bachner J and Ginsberg B (2020, July) *America's State Governments: A Critical Look at Disconnected Democracies* (1st edition ed.). New York London: Routledge.

Bishop B (2008) *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart*. Boston, Massachusetts, United States: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Burt JM (2023) *Understanding Elected Officeholder Endorsements in Presidential Primaries*. Ph. D. thesis. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan.

Chou M, Moffitt B and Busbridge R (2022) The localist turn in populism studies. *Swiss Political Science Review* 28(1): 129–141.

Cohen M, Karol D, Noel H, et al. (2008) *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform*. Chicago, Illinois, United States: University of Chicago Press.

Dowdle AJ, Adkins RE, Sebold K, et al. (2016) Forecasting presidential nominations in 2016: #WePredictedClintonANDTrump. *PS: Political Science & Politics* 49(4): 691–695.

Drapalova E and Wegrich K (2021) Technocratic populism and subnational governance. *Government and Opposition* 56(4): 640–660.

Eatwell R and Goodwin M (2018) *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy*. London, United Kingdom: Penguin Books Limited.

Fitzgerald J (2018) *Close to Home: Local Ties and Voting Radical Right in Europe*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Galston WA (2017) The 2016 U.S. Election: the populist moment. *Journal of Democracy* 28(2): 21–33.

Gleiber DW and Shull SA (1992) Presidential influence in the policymaking process. *The Western Political Quarterly* 45(2): 441–467.

Greven T (2016) *The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Europe and the United States*. Berlin, Germany: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Available at: https://dc.fes.de/news-list/e/the-rise-of-right-wing-populism-in-europe-and-the-united-states.html.

Hawkins KA (2009) Is Chavez populist? measuring populist discourse in comparative perspective. *Comparative Political Studies* 42(8): 1040–1067.

Hawkins K (2016) Populism and the 2016 U.S. Presidential election in comparative perspective. *Comparative Politics Newsletter* 26(2): 91–97.

Hawkins KA and Kaltwasser CR (2019) The Ideational Approach. edited by Kirk A. Hawkins, Ryan Carlin, Levente Littvay, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. *The Ideational Approach to Populism: Concept, Theory, and Analysis*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Hawkins K and Littvay L (2019) *Contemporary US Populism in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hawkins KA, Aguilar R, Castanho Silva B, et al. (2022) *Global Populism Database*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States: Harvard Dataverse.

Hopkins DJ (2018) *The Increasingly United States: How and Why American Political Behavior Nationalized*. Chicago, Illinois, United States: University of Chicago Press.

Howell WG and Lewis DE (2002) Agencies by presidential design. *The Journal of Politics* 64(4): 1095–1114.

Inglehart RF and Norris P (2016) *Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States: John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Jenne EK, Hawkins KA and Silva BC (2021) Mapping populism and nationalism in leader rhetoric across North America and Europe. *Studies in Comparative International Development* 56(2): 170–196.

Kiss SJ, Perrella AML and Spicer Z (2020) Right-wing populism in a metropolis: personal financial stress, conservative attitudes, and Rob Ford's Toronto. *Journal of Urban Affairs* 42(7): 1028–1046.

Krippendorff K (2004) *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology*. Thousand Oaks, California, United States: Sage.

Lenz GS (2012) *Follow the Leader? How Voters Respond to Politicians' Policies and Performance*. Chicago, Illinois, United States: University of Chicago Press.

Lindsay RB and Galán AD (2021) *Is Joe Biden a Populist? An Analysis of Biden's Campaign Speeches*. Team Populism Leader Profile Series.

Moe T (1985) The politicized presidency. In: Chubb JE and Peterson PE (eds) *The New Direction in American Politics*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Mudde C (2015) *The Trump Phenomenon and the European Populist Radical Right*. Washington Post.

Nyhan B and Montgomery JM (2015) Connecting the candidates: consultant networks and the diffusion of campaign strategy in American congressional elections. *American Journal of Political Science* 59(2): 292–308.

Paxton F (2020) Towards a populist local democracy? The consequences of populist radical right local government leadership in Western Europe. *Representation* 56(3): 411–430.

Rooduijn M, de Lange SL and van der Brug W (2014) A populist Zeitgeist? Programmatic contagion by populist parties in Western Europe. *Party Politics* 20(4): 563–575.

Silver D, Taylor Z and Calderón-Figueroa F (2020) Populism in the city: the case of ford nation. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 33(1): 1–21.

Songer DR (1984) Government closest to the people: constituent knowledge in state & national politics. *Polity* 17(2): 387–395.

Taber KS (2018) The use of Cronbach's alpha when developing and reporting research instruments in science education. *Research in Science Education* 48(6): 1273–1296.

Wiesehomeier N, Dupont N and Ruth-Lovell SP (2024) Xs we share: context similarity, culture, and the diffusion of populism. *American Journal of Political Science*.

Zakaria F (2016) Populism on the March: why the west is in trouble. *Foreign Affairs* 95: 9.

Zaller JR (1992) *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (1st edition ed.). Cambridge. University Press.

Author biographies

Semir Dzebo is a PhD Candidate in the Doctoral School of Political Science, Public Policy, and International Relations at Central European University in Vienna, Austria. His research focuses on populist rhetoric in elite discourse and its consequences, as well as the individual level determinants of support for separatist movements.

Erin K. Jenne is a professor at the International Relations Department at Central European University in Vienna, Austria, where she teaches MA and PhD courses on mixed qualitative and quantitative methods, ethnic conflict management, nationalism, populism, foreign policy analysis and international security.

Levente (Levi) Littvay is a Research Professor at the Institute for Political Science at HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences, a Senior Research Fellow at Central European University Democracy Institute in Budapest, Hungary, head of Team Survey at Team Populism, and founder and Academic Coordinator of MethodsNET. Research revolves around methods and measurement, populist, democratic, and secessionist attitudes, and the use of large language models in social research methods.

Kirk A. Hawkins is a professor in the Department of Political Science at Brigham Young University and the director of Team Populism, a scholarly network dedicated to the global study of populism and its consequences. He has published research on political linkages, the impact and spread of political ideas, and depolarization.

Olaf van der Veen is a PhD Candidate in the School of Governance at Utrecht University. His research focuses on the reactions of political elites to uncertainty. Other research interests include populism and political polarisation.