

populism vs nativism

etym. from Latin *populus*, the aggregate of private persons, the plebs

etym. from Latin *nativus*, innate, produced by birth, the autochthon

Lumping together disparate challengers to liberal democracy under the ill-defined label of “populism” is wrong. Here is how to distinguish populists from nativists.

A novel political system that developed in the aftermath of World War Two, populism abides by electoral democracy but disrespects modern liberal institutions. It pledges to serve the interests of social majorities (the fabled “people”), if necessary at the expense of constitutional legality. Minimally defined as “democratic illiberalism.”

Particularly developed in advanced liberal European states, nativism embraces both democracy’s electoral rules and modern liberal institutions. It champions policies that protect the interests of native-born and already established inhabitants against alien populations, especially immigrants and foreigners.

What populists say



“The real democracy is the one in which the government does what the people want and defends only one interest—the people’s.”

Juan Perón,
Argentina

“There are no institutions, only the people exist.”

Andreas Papandreou,
Greece

“To hell with your institutions!”

A. M. López Obrador, Mexico

“A democracy does not necessarily have to be liberal ... [T]he new state that we are constructing in Hungary is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state.”

Viktor Orbán,
Hungary

What nativists say



“The social order of Islam is opposed to our Western values. Human rights and democracy are as incompatible with the Muslim religious doctrine as is the equality of women.”

Jörg Haider,
Austria

“I want to destroy the EU, not Europe. I believe in a Europe of nation states.”

Marine Le Pen,
France

“Take a walk down the street and see where this is going. You no longer feel like you are living in your own country. There is a battle going on and we have to defend ourselves. Before you know it there will be more mosques than churches.”

Geert Wilders,
Netherlands

“The euro is a failed currency, a wrong currency, a failed experiment.”

Matteo Salvini,
Italy

Ten ways to tell apart populists and nativists

Postwar democracies with a liberal tradition in Europe and the Americas	1	Geographical reference	Contemporary European nations, all of them liberal democracies
Populist parties stand on either left or right	2	Ideological stance	Nativist parties typically stand on the right
Irreconcilably split in just two parts, “the people” and the “elites”	3	View of society	A homogenous national entity imperiled by alien minorities and cultures
Aim at general political change: promote illiberal democracy	4	Political goals	Aim at specific policy changes: promote liberal democracy for the natives
Political polarization, patronage politics when in office	5	Chief political methods	Mostly programmatic appeals for gaining certain issue ownership
Charismatic and extraordinary, predominantly male	6	Leadership characteristics	Ordinary non-charismatic, often collective, with a good share of women
Relatively strong and cohesive parties under single leader authority	7	Party organization	Weak party organizations, intense infighting, often prone to premature death
Populists have won office in many countries, often singlehandedly	8	Power capture	Europe’s nativists win office rarely, most typically as junior coalition partners
Strong staying power with high potential of radical political transformation	9	Performance in office	Weak staying power with some potential of own policy implementation
In populism, officials must serve voters irrespective of institutions and liberal principles	10	Core democratic idea	In nativism, officials use liberal institutions to serve native voters while fending off alien ones

Locating populist and nativist parties

All populist parties displayed below (map on left) have enjoyed power in their respective countries. Europe’s nativist parties (map on right) that have risen to office, usually as junior coalition partners, are marked with an asterisk*



References

The content in this infographic draws from original research by Dr. Takis S Pappas, some of it included in the following works:

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