

Rise of Populism

Rise of Populism: Promoting Awareness Towards Populist Ideologies

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What is Populism:

Populism is defined as the separation of society into two opposing groups – ‘ordinary’ people and the elite. Populism has no exclusive set of characteristics. However, they enjoy **family resemblances** - they place priority on the nation state (Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, 2017). In general, populist leaders are:

1. **Anti-Elitists** – Target different elite groups based on class, race or religion.
2. **Against checks and balances** – They attack systemic limits (Legislative, Judicial and Media Freedom)
3. **Reductive** – Offer reductive answers to complicated solutions

Populism cannot be defined by its content but instead through its execution: through **political greening** which focuses on social justice; and **direct democracy** which focuses on the direct establishment of policies.

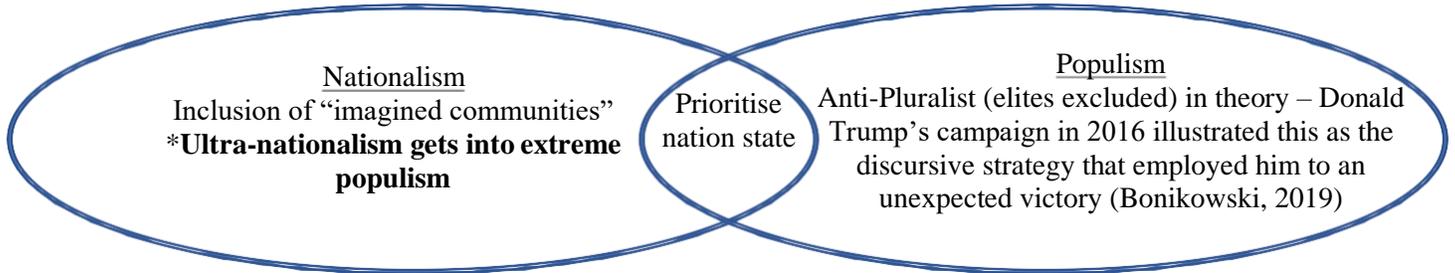
Left Wing vs. Right Wing Populist

Left-wing populism: Unites the middle and bottom classes against the top.

Right-wing populism: Focuses on conflict between the ‘ordinary’ people and the elite. This includes the elite groups that are coddling a third group. Both can be misleading since the groups take different forms depending on the issues that surface

Populism vs Nationalism:

Commonly misidentified as similar, populism and nationalism need to be set apart for the two to focus on different factors; populism denies coexistence in the nation whilst nationalism focuses on collective identity. Despite these differences, they also coalesce in some ways as shown below:



- Nationalism: Everyone is bound through citizenship, patriotism and belonging. The “**imagined community**” overlaps with the **social imaginary** as it serves a public purpose.
- Populism: **Fractures the “imagined community”** which identifies the community as a social construct (Anderson, 1991); **and social imaginary** which observes how people share a common understanding of their social surroundings (Taylor, 2004), excluding specific groups from their in-crowd like the elites and populist leaders. As such, populists have **tight national values** and they choose their ingroup based on ethnicity, culture and religion. They view themselves as nationalists because it creates political branding; it is **respectable**, it **bonds people** and it **justifies citizenship**.

Populist nationalism is not:

An ideology, but it appeals to people’s emotions inclusive of the “nation”

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Populist nationalism is unwelcoming because it divides the nation by excluding certain societal groups. President Trump declares himself a nationalist because he sees himself as caring primarily about America and what is good for them (Cilizza, 2018)

“A globalist is a person that wants the globe to do well, frankly, not caring about our country so much. And you know what? We can’t have that.” - Donald Trump (Blake, 2018)

Populist Global Trends:

Western and non-Western examples have been analyzed in this paper to identify the rise of populism globally. By analyzing evidence, readers would gain an understanding on how populism emerges universally. Non-Western states will be able to use the findings and mistakes of Western populist states to guide and prevent them from making the same errors. However, some states in Southeast Asia are promoting a different kind of populism due to weak, deeply solidified and long-established party politics (Kurlantzick, 2018). This can be illustrated with case studies of countries like Italy, the Philippines and India.

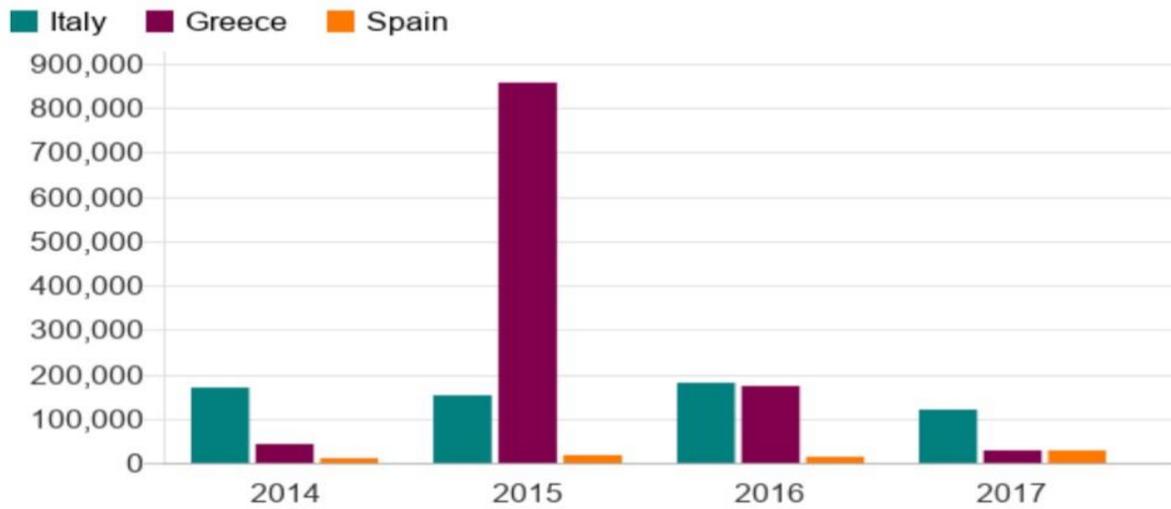
Italy:

Italy embraced populism due to the alarming **rates of inequality** present. Inequality began emerging during the 2008 financial crisis and recession in Europe. The economic crisis reduced standards of living in Italy and caused unemployment rates to increase (7.8% as per 2009) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to fall (Coletto, 2018). Italy was also facing corruption, mismanagement of the national economy and the refugee crisis which persuaded its people to lean towards populism (Henley, 2019). Right-wing populism was thus adopted by the Italian state due to the economic issues that they faced.

The graph below (Figure 1) shows that there was a fall in the number of migrants and refugee arrivals in Italy. 20120 migrants and refugees arrived in 2018, which was a lower number compared to 2016 and 2017 (UNHCR, 2018). This illustrates the idea that **numbers and rankings** have been used by the Five Star Movement to manipulate and intimidate Italians. The Five Star Movement is a populist movement that aims to replace the Italian parliament (Loucaides, 2019). The party uses **exaggerated statistics to argue that migrants and refugees posed a threat to Italians**. A joint policy document was released by the Five Star Movement showing plans to build more detention centers to accelerate deportation of an estimated 500,000 illegal immigrants (Giuffrida, 2018). The Five Star Movement is being **selective to prevent the rise of mass migration** within Italy. Overall, populism rose in Italy because of the **free market and mass migration**.

Migrants and refugees

Total arrivals 2014-17



Source: UNHCR

BBC

Figure 1: Total arrivals of migrants and refugees in Italy, Greece, and Spain between 2014-2017 (UNHCR, 2018)

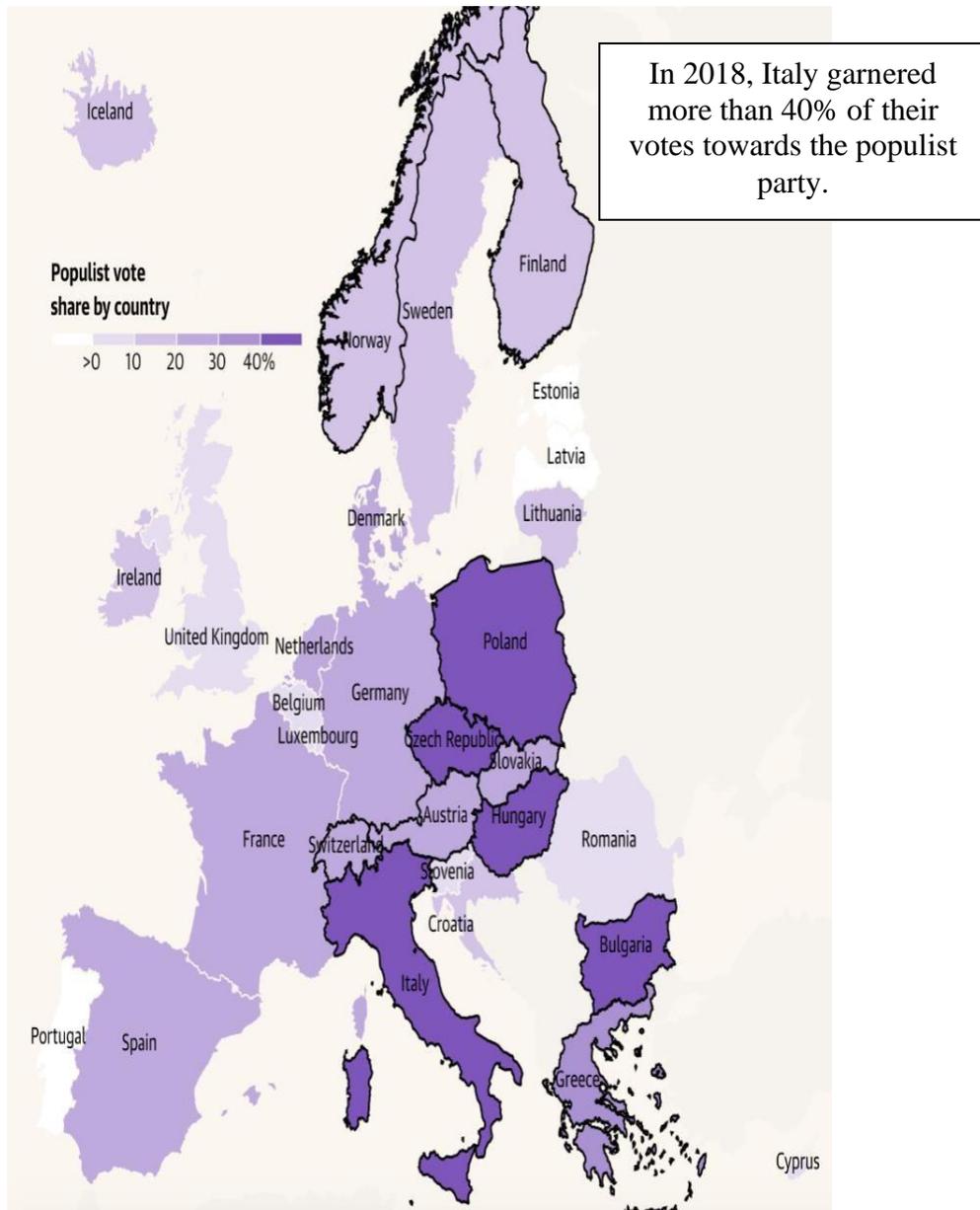


Figure 2: Map of the populist vote share by country in Europe (The Rise, n.d.)

Philippines:

A mix of factors influenced the rise of populism in the Philippines (Mendoza, n.d.).

Corruption and mismanagement are the main factors which enabled populism to flourish in the Philippines. However, other factors like **inequality of lifestyle** and **rapid urbanization** have also boosted populism. These have led to an increase in poverty within the nation.

Under President Rodrigo Duterte, widespread incidences of poverty decreased significantly. The percentages on Figure 3 illustrate how both these incidences were lower in 2018. This shows how effective Duterte was



Image 2: *President Rodrigo Duterte* (n.d.)

in reducing the rates of impoverishment within the Philippines. **Numbers have been emphasized to show the positive effects** Duterte had on state poverty. By quantifying this factor, the Filipino government has been able to classify poverty as **an object of political intervention** (Mau & Howe, 2019). Therefore, the quantification of poverty provided a visual representation that Filipinos could examine on their own.

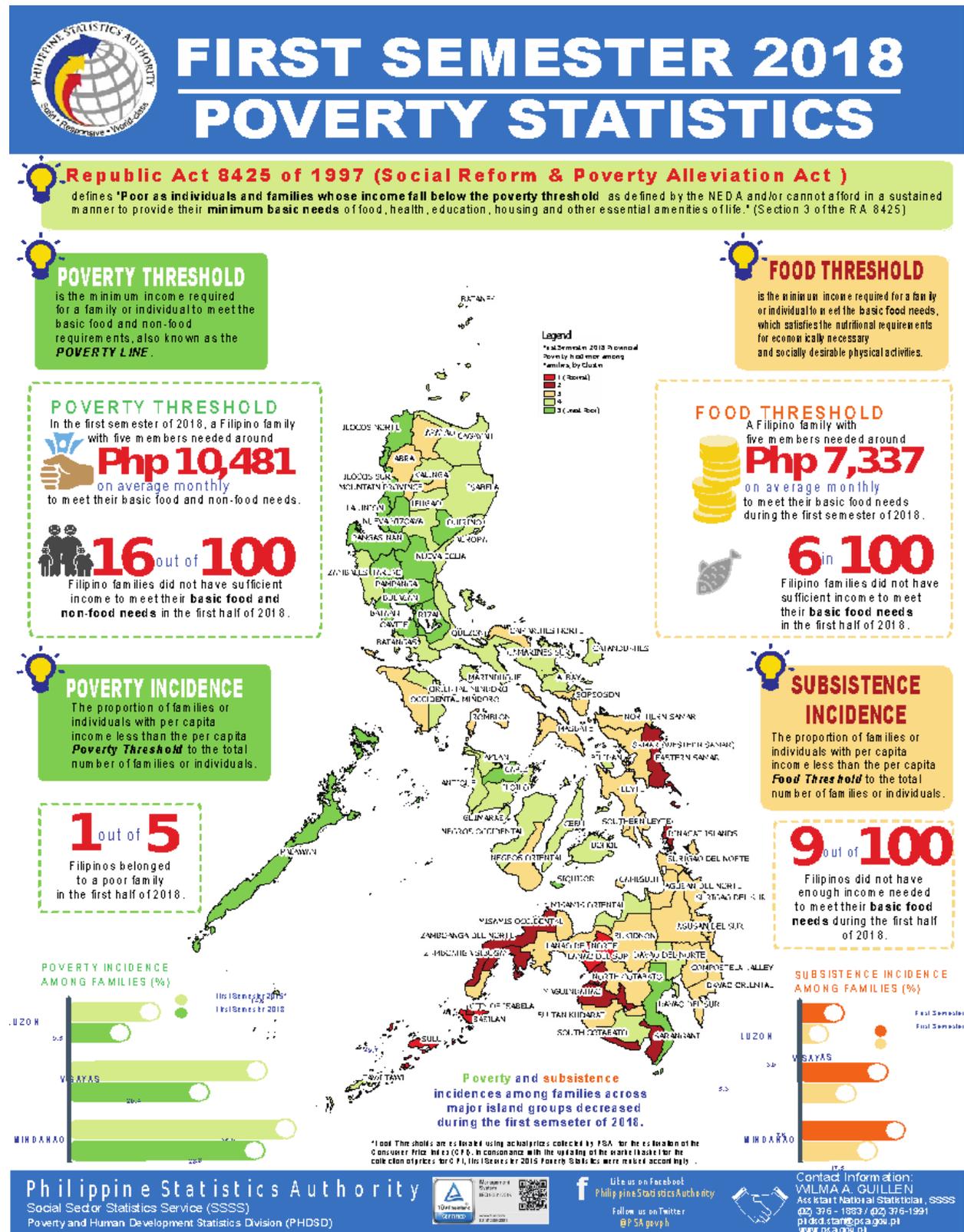


Figure 3: Philippines poverty statistics (Philippines Statistics Authority, n.d.)

War on Drugs:

Duterte's governing method qualifies him as a populist leader. In 2016, Duterte won the presidency because **of his promise to reduce crime and drug rates** in the Philippines (Mogato et al., 2016). For some, Duterte's rule is viewed positively as he was able to eradicate social and economic problems that the country faced. On the other hand, some citizens view his rule negatively as he goes against international human rights law. Duterte **has killed more than 5000 people** (France-Presse, 2019) **without giving them a fair trial**. His drug war has raised the attention of Human Rights Watch since the killing of drug lords and dealers is a form of arbitrary and extrajudicial execution.

“Hitler massacred 3 million Jews... there's 3 million drug addicts. There are, I'd be happy to slaughter them.”
(President Duterte, 2016)

Despite this, Duterte has received a **79% approval rating** showing the huge support he receives from the general Filipino population (*Philippines Elections*, 2017). Duterte's high approval ratings are due to manipulating Filipinos by arguing that **killing criminals would reduce crime rates in the Philippines**, a rhetoric which proved to be appealing to his crowd. Therefore Duterte: 1) sees **checks and balances as inconvenient**; and 2) uses his **authoritative power to attack these limits**.

India:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi employs a **nationalist approach** to gain support from his people. He appeals to the Hindu majority with his **charisma** which has led to the fall of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rivals. The relentless ubiquity of his face, in print, on screens and in the streets may be something that money and power can buy—and the BJP has plenty of both (*Narendra Modi, 2019*). BJP wealth and power have been used to **control the Indian media**. Media control has enabled Modi to **create religious branding** which is respected by his Hindu followers, leading to increased altercations based on Hindutva, an identity that revolves around India as a nation, the Indian culture and the Hindu religion. In India, Modi has become a vessel for dreams, but he is also a vessel for anger against the elites (*Narendra Modi, 2019*). Hence, the Indian social imaginary is fractured by prioritizing and appealing to Hindus whilst employing an anti-elitist stance.

In 2019, Modi attempted to implement the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) which grants non-Muslim migrants fast-track residency from three majority-Muslim countries—Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan — which could lead to increased Islamophobia (Kuchay, 2020). Whilst people have been protesting against the CAA, Modi defended the law as he believes that the CAA is beneficial for the state. Prime Minister Modi said the government has established the CAA to correct “historical injustices” and to fulfil BJP’s “old promise” to religious minorities living in neighbouring countries (*CAA to Fulfill, 2020*).

How do they relate?:

Populism is universal because of the foundational similarities that different countries share. Through global trends, we can see how populism is dangerous because leaders are:

- **Selective** – They appeal to an in-crowd by selling and providing people with “extra-factual information”. This term that encompasses not only misleading and unverified statements, but also other sources of non-factual claims (Greenhill, 2018)
- **Against the Constitution** – They would do anything to enact laws that promote exclusion by providing “real” solutions for their followers. An example of this is the immigration policies that Trump has established whereby certain countries are banned from entering the state (Strauss, 2020). Therefore, populists are against the elitism of constitutionalists and those tasked with safeguarding the constitution. This erodes trust in the political system which leads to democratic backsliding.
- **Against Checks and Balances** – They instill fear in people by rupturing and fragmenting system limits and legislations within the constitution that populist officials find inconvenient.

Strategies to combat populism:

Populism fractures the social imaginary and creates vulnerability within the masses, therefore effective strategies are required to reduce its spread, such as:

1. Civil Society – Valuable groups that protect threatened civic spaces from populism:

- Defend **liberal democracy**
- **Establishment of different group memberships** which civilians could anchor towards based on the issues they face. **The more memberships the individual has, the more protection they have against populism because they can use their support systems to actively participate in political conversations.**



Image 3: *We are the 99%* (2011)

- **Creates networks** through civil society groups which can **act as support** against those who feel threatened
- **Uncertainty** behind civil society groups because it can **provide systemic resistance** to populist ideology
- **Good civil society guards bad civil society**; empower people to filter populist truth

*Example: The **Occupy Wall Street Movement** (2011) where groups with diverse backgrounds protested against financial greed and corruption*

2. Role of Media:

Traditional Media (Radio, Television, Billboards)

- **Passive reports** about populism are made by media outlets. **The more outrageous the statement, the more media time is granted, which exacerbates and fuels populism**
- It is important for media outlets to **tell the truth** but it is **risky**. Populists would find these media companies and shut them down. An example of this would be Duterte's shut down of ABS-CBN, the country's leading broadcast network because the outlet was being critical of his leadership (Gutierrez, 2020).
- **Justice commercials and documentaries** can be displayed to block out populist "truth"

New Media (Social Media, Blogs, YouTube)

- Media platforms **belong to everybody**
- **Can spread awareness** of populism through posts and blogs
- **An educational tool** for civil society activists to educate themselves and those around them but this can be



Image 4: Neo-Nazi groups network online, rather than real life (n.d.)

- **risky since extreme populist groups can also create content to support populism**
- **Globalized networking:** Social groups can be made to provide support

*Example: YouTube plans to remove video contents and channels that support neo-Nazism, white supremacy and other bigoted ideologies to try and **remove extremist thoughts and hate speech** from its platform (Roose & Conger, 2019).*

3. Civic Education:

- Implementation of civic education in pre-school to university curriculums **which will emphasize the need for checks and balances**
- **It is a long-term goal** but can be used as a starting point to **empower generations** towards liberal democracy
- Allows youth to **understand differences between democratic and populist approaches**

Example: The Malaysian government is reintroducing civic education into national school syllabi to educate citizens on their rights and duties (Tan, 2016)

Conclusion:

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1963) once said, *“injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny”*. One would unknowingly support populism due to the misinformation that they receive from their populist governments. By supporting populism, individuals risk losing the lives of everyone including their own towards injustices. Populism may be enchanting, but it is



Image 5: *Teaching Civics Anew* (2019)

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indeed dangerous because it divides people, and is akin to a wolf in sheep's clothing. Today, globalization has allowed for our society to be intertwined which means that our rights as citizens should be preserved allowing us to fight against the rise of populism. This is a task we should not take lightly, especially now as the pillars of democracies crumble before our very eyes.

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