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Populist polarization in Italian politics, 1994-2016 : an assessment from a Latin American analytical perspective

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Citation

Zanotti, L. (2019, September 26). *Populist polarization in Italian politics, 1994-2016 : an assessment from a Latin American analytical perspective*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/78561>

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Issue Date: 2019-09-26

Propositions

- 1) Classical studies on Latin American populism have proved to be very insightful to understand the current populist phenomenon in the old continent. The next step will be to test the usefulness of recent work on European populism to understand present-day populism in Latin America.
- 2) Populism under certain conditions, such as in the Italian case, can create political identities. If these identities last long enough they can affect the structure of party systems thorough political cleavages that separate those who are in favour and those who are against.
- 3) A comprehensive analysis of the Italian party system since 1994 until the present, shows that it underwent a transformation not only at the level of the parties, but also of the subjacent cleavages that structure the party system.
- 4) Until now, Italian party system seems the only one that is at least partially structured by the populism/anti-populist cleavage in Europe. However, other authors analysed the Greek party system since after the return to democracy maintained that Greece could be considered as another positive case.
- 5) In recent years a debate has aroused around the concept of cleavages partly due to the focus on the analysis of non-European party systems. In analysing such party systems, some of the characteristics that Lipset and Rokkan mentioned to characterize a cleavage seem less relevant.
- 6) The concept of polarisation has been broadly debated nowadays. In many of these accounts the concept has been associated with a negative bias. However, in itself, the concept does not seem at odds with democracy.
- 7) Following the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil in 2018, some scholars maintain that a fourth wave of populist has begun in Latin America with features similar to those of populist radical right parties in Europe. However, is still not clear whether Bolsonaro's populist ideology is more similar to the latter or to the ideology of extreme right parties.
- 8) Populism in Latin America, in most cases has created identities in favour or against a certain political leader. These identities in some cases contribute to structure party systems. Examples of this are Peronism/anti-peronism in Argentina and Fujimorism/anti-fujimorism in Peru. On the other hand, in Europe, this has not happened, except in very few cases, even if the populist phenomenon is growing in the last years.
- 9) While the so-called mainstream parties seemed in crisis in most European countries, the May 2019 election in Spain gained by the PSOE, has been interpreted by many as a sort of fresh start. In my view this represents an accurate interpretation.

10) The Five Star Movement is the latest Italian party. However, due to its unconventional nature, it cannot be placed in the left-right axis of competition. This in my view may reduce the party's chances of survival in the midterm.