

Policy Making in Populist Context

Negin Bavili

Political Science and Public Administration, Ankara University, Ankara, Turkey

Email: editor.hamyari@gmail.com

How to cite this paper: Bavili, N. (2017). Policy Making in Populist Context. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 7, 432-439. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2017.73034>

Received: February 15, 2017

Accepted: July 24, 2017

Published: July 27, 2017

Copyright © 2017 by author and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

In this paper, how policy making can be affected by different political contexts will be studied. This study considers negative meaning load for the word populism and assumes populism as a communicative strategy that politicians use in order to get in touch with unrecognized sections of society. Populist Context with concentration on the role of people would help politicians manipulate mass of people and benefit welfare policies as means in attraction of people in order to achieve their goals. And comparison of welfare policies in Iran after 1989 will clarify how Ahmedinejad's populist policy making affected Iran's welfare.

Keywords

Policy Making, Populist Policy Making, Populism, Political Analysis of Populism

1. Role of People in Populist Context

The famous phrase of President Lincoln as cited in 1863 in Gettysbury declares an important Formula (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 1988). His important formula was "the government of the people, by the people, for the people". The notion of "the people" incorporates the idea of antagonist conflict between two groups, with the romantic view of the purity of the people. As a result, "The People" of the populism has been imagined as an undifferentiated, unified, fixed and homogenous entity (Torre, 2013).

Ralf waldo Emerson in mid-19th century concentrated on the importance of the people by the famous proverb that "March without the people, and you march into the night" (Waldo, 1929). Contrary to this view, for empirical researchers, "the people" is one of the slippery concepts in political science. It can mean many different things to many different people in many different circumstances. But worshiping of the people is in the center of politics in populism (Matthijis, 2010).

Concentrating on the role of people can be seen both in democratic and dictator systems. And great attention to the will of the people and paying superiority to the people and their wills best confronted by a kind of political analysis called populism. Under populist discourse, the people share the identity, interests and form a collective body “which is able to express this will and take decisions” (Torre, 2013).

Canovan also discusses another aspect that may explain amorphous character of the people. According to Canovan in the English speaking world, the term “people” doesn’t only signify a collective unit of analysis. It also refers to the “individual in general” which adds extra elements of ambiguity. It causes that that sovereign people look like a collection of individuals as well as collective body” (Canovan, 1999).

Hossein Abutorabi employs a metaphor to explain about the controversial concept of populism; a drove of sheep and goats follow the dog of the shepherd as they hear the sound of the float. Hossein Abutorabi compares the people who follow by closed eyes or obey without thinking with a drove of sheep and goats. As a result, Hossein Abutorabi doesn’t consider pure people as central idea of populism but he considers people who don’t think and obey without thinking are central to theme of populism (Abutorabian, 1999).

Canovan contends that “the people” is particularly open and indefinite. Canovan brings the concept of “the people” from the theoretical realm and out into the political world. Populism is an imprecise concept that may be rendered as bringing “politics to the people” and “the people to the politics”. Its intrinsic vagueness is exacerbated by its usage in everyday politics. Populism can be supposed as a knife with two edges which were born in representative and constitution age and it was devastating for democracy (Canovan, 1999).

Margaret Canovan explained that populism had two common characteristics: First one is the centrality of people and the second one is anti-elitism. In defining vague concepts like populism determining what it is, may be difficult but deciding what it isn’t can give some information about it. Populism is a vague concept which can gain different features and characteristics in different situations but we can find common features among different manifestations of it in different parts of the world. Populism as a concept which many researchers consider its defining as a difficult work can be clarified with what the concept is against (Brown, 1996).

2. Mobilization of People in Populist Context

In the field of sociology, populist cases can provide strategic sites for investigating a range of issues: populist mobilization can be considered as a political project of mobilization; in which large scale of political projects mobilize ordinary and marginalized social sectors. “Populist rhetoric” reminds an anti-elite discourse and valorizes the role of ordinary people (Johnson, 2011).

Paul Taggart has defined populism based on six characteristics: First, being hostile to representative politics. Second, having a heartland. Third, lacking core

values. Fourth, reaching to a sense of crisis. Fifth, being self-limiting. Sixth, chameleonic (a highly developed ability to change color) (Taggart, 2007).

Populism is widely used and rarely defined. Also, there is flexibility in the way populism is used but the identification of a set of core ideas is possible. Populism can be defined as negative reaction to the institutions of representative politics. Populism, in some sense, a reaction against modern politics (Taggart, 2007).

3. Different Interpretations of Populism

Hossein abutorabi discussed that populism is result of lack of reflection and rationality in society. He mentions that when press and social media do not perform their duties perfectly, rationality doesn't grow up in the society. Since rationality is not considered necessary element in decision making we can imagine the emergence of populism (Abutorabian, 2003).

Different writers like Mudde (2004, 2007) and Kaltwasser, defined a set of interrelated ideas about nature of politics and society in which the unit of analysis are parties and party leaders. Other politicians like Kazin (1995), Laclau (2005), Panizza (2005), who view populism as a political style, a way of making claims about politics characteristics of discourse and unit of analysis are texts, speeches, and political discourse. Other politicians as Roberts (2006), Wayland (2001), and Johnson (2011) view populism, as a political strategy, define populism as a form of mobilization and organization and unit of analysis is with a focus on structures and using a comparative, historical and case studies (Noam Gidron, Bart Bonikowski, 2004).

Laclau considers populism as a category of political analysis which is vague and imprecise. Laclau considers contrasting components such as a claim for equality of political rights and universal participation for the common people which fused with a sort of authoritarianism. Ernesto Laclau considers populism as an ideology which protects the right of common people against the privileged interest groups (Laclau, 2005).

Margaret Canovan in 1999 in her definition of populism considers it as a problem of modernization in which simple rural people with traditional values who compose majority confront with financial capital. Populism as political movement has the support of mass of working class or peasantry. Moreover she mentions that populists rarely call themselves populists and usually reject the term when it is applied to them by others.

4. Populism as a Communicative Tool

Several scholars see populism as a tool, strategy, technique, tactics, ideology or a certain style of politics. Jagers and Walgrave (2007), consider populism as a strategy. In their approach, the defining element of populism is an appeal to the people "populous", with which populist parties identify and legitimate themselves. Hawkins (2007), conceptualizes populism as apolitical discourse. Mudde (2011), points out that political populism is then basically reduced to nothing more than political campaigning techniques. Furthermore, two features of po-

populism are held constant among different authors: “the elites” and “the people”. Cas Mudde, defines populism as a thin centered ideology which separates society in two antagonist groups, “the pure people” versus the “corrupt elite”. Furthermore, populism calls for policies as expression of general will of the people. Accordingly, populism is anti-elitist and anti-establishment.

Taggart (2007), clarifies that sometimes populist concept is confused with a style that seeks to be popular. Populism is widely used and rarely defined. Taggart (2007), considers populism as a negative response to the phenomenon of politics, and then populism is a reaction against modern politics. Williams (1977), defines populism as an ideology which pits a virtuous and homogenous people against a set of elites and dangerous “others” who are together depicted as depriving the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity and identity and voice.

Other writers like de Jasper, Hollanders, & Krouel (2004), discuss that populism is an ideology with several constituent elements, all derived from its central aim: to inject the will of the sovereign people into democratic decision making process. As mentioned, Social scientists have offered a variety of definitions of populism over the past half century, but scholars like Kirk A. Hawkins (2007), define populism discursively use different labels .

As declared before, different writers have different understanding of the concept populism. They approach populism from different angles to analyze the political discourses. Every political discourse has its own characteristics and features. But by analyzing these contexts, common points between them can be clarified. Populism can be supposed as a phenomenon which defines tactics used by politicians to win the power without considering the dominant conditions and type of the government (de Jasper, Hollanders, & Krouel, 2004).

American historian Michael Kazan considers populism a democratic expression of political life that is needed from time to time to rebalance the distribution of political power for the benefit of majority. Through the vehicle of populism, “American have been able to protest social and economic inequalities without questioning the entire system”. Behind the veil of the political process stands what really matters: the voice of the people. Mises believes that there is a connection between public opinion and public policy. He declares that politicians who consider public opinion tend to win the power positions but politicians who do not consider public opinion are not successful (Caplau, Stringham, & Mises, 2005).

5. Political Analysis of Populism

Populism, as a category of political analysis, confronts us with problems. Like all ideologies, populism proposes an analysis to respond to a number of questions: “What went wrong? who is to blame? And what is to be done to reserve the situation?”

Populists claim that government and democracy, which should reflect the will of the people, have been occupied, distorted and exploited by corrupt elites. The second proposition is that the elites and “others” are to blame for the current undesirable situations. The third proposition is that people has lost their role in

political system. And populism suggests taking the barrier away. And another proposition about populism is that it considers people as homogeneous and virtuous. By contrast, the enemies of the people the elite and “others” are neither homogeneous nor virtuous (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 1988).

Said Hajjariyan (1985) claims that populist government are not result of conflict between two social classes but populism can be assumed a consequence of confrontation between dominant class and under dominance (the people). According to Said Hajjariyan, the central character of populist government is that the executive section of government has developed enormously and Montesquieu’s separation of power paradigm has been violated. Furthermore, civil society has lost its independence and integrated to the government (Hajjariyan, 1985).

Populism through a complex mechanism and concentrating on the role of people tries to dominate public opinion and politicians who follow the wills of the people. In other words can be said that public policies which can have direct or indirect effect on the lives of the people. From another point of view, public policies can be seen as output of the political system. Public policies come along in different forms, including laws, regulations. Another definition by Krill and Tosun (2008), considers policy making as a strategy to solve social problems by using institutions. Agenda setting, Policy formulation, Policy adoption, Implementation, and evaluation are stages of policy cycle. It should be mentioned that in cooperative political systems policy making process can be an extremely complex. Also, it can be claimed that policy making does not consist of a simple and single stage.

6. Populism in Policy Making Process

Public policy can be considered result of decision making process: what kinds of interests are considered in policy making process in populist governments? Is interest of people important in populist policy making process? Do populist governments consider the interest of people in policy making process?

Decision making in Plato’s era is different from the modern and postmodern era. In Plato era, decision making was an easy task moreover; there was a proposition that public guardians make the wisest decisions based on the facts available. But as the world has changed, decision making is not an easy task which an expert could do (Gauvin, 1998).

Decisions making in public era has emerged as subfield of political science in mid-1960s. Public Policy is the study of government decisions and actions. Policy analysis describes the investigation that produces accurate and useful information for decision makers (Cochran & Malone, 2005).

Political and social scientists make distinction between policy making and decision making. Decision making as a component of public policy making deals with the process of making choices. In other words, decision making involves making a discrete choice from among two or more alternatives. Public policy encompasses a flow and pattern of action that extends over time and includes many decisions. Public Policy as followed by government in dealing with problem: first, public policy is purposive or goal-oriented and in its positive sense is

based on law. Secondly, policies consist of courses of action which emerge in response to policy demands (Anderson, 2003).

Public policy making can be thought as a strategy for resolving social problems by using institutions. Public policy making doesn't constitute a single stage but it is a process for attaining these goals. Public policy making constitutes long series of actions carried out to solve social problems. Agenda setting, Policy formulation, policy adoption, Implementation and evaluation can be considered as complex process of public policy making (Krill & Tosun, 2008).

There are a number of conceptual models that help to clarify our understanding of relationship between politics and public policies. The major models that can be found in the literature are institutional model, rational model, the incremental model, the group model, the elite model, and the process models are complimentary models.

Elite Model theory of policy making is determined by preferences of governing of elite. The essential argument of elite theory is that public policy is not determined by the demands and actions of the people or masses but by ruling elite whose preferences are in effect by public officials and agencies (Krill & Tosun, 2008).

Thomas Dye provides a summary of Elite theory:

Firstly, in this model of analysis the society is divided into few who have power and many who don't. The few who govern aren't typical of masses that are governed. Elites share a consensus on the basic values of social system. Public policy in elite theory doesn't reflect demands of masses (Anderson, 2003).

Opposite to Elite model theory another model can be populist model in which public policy making is not determined by elite. Populist public policy making Model can be assumed the opposite version of Elite model.

7. Illustration of Populism in Different Contexts

This paper investigates populist policies as political phenomenon which affects country, region and world. This study intends to examine Implementation of Populist Policies during Ahmadinejad government from 2005 to 2013. What were these populist policies? And what kind of affect do these policies have on people's lives? Populist policies during Ahmadinejad as output of political system will be analyzed. In order to show distinctive features of populist policies, comparative analysis of policies will be done. How welfare policies during Ahmadinejad period are different from welfare policies during presidency of Khatami and Haşemi Rafsanjani?

During presidency of Haşemi Rafsanjani centralized social welfare policies were implemented in developed and poor regions of countries. Health centers in undeveloped regions of country provided health care for all classes and pregnancy prevention facilities and training were provided for women in all parts of country. Also, during presidency of Haşemi Rafsanjani, women development centers were established in order to improve life conditions in different regions of the country. Subsidies, as welfare policies were conducted in different regions of the country. Welfare policies in constructive discourse of Haşemi Rafsanjani

were implemented vastly in order to reconstruct ruined areas of Iran-Iraq war.

After Constructive discourse of Haşemi Refsanjani, Khatemi presidency between 1995-2005 years, reformist discourse came into satisfy needs of society. Reformist discourse attempted to reorganize infrastructure in order to improve political, social, and economical life of the people. In reform context, need-based policy analysis was conducted in order to improve social welfare. In the last years of president Khatemi ministry of welfare was established by parliamentary confirmation. It was planned to provide social welfare and social security for all Iranians.

But all these planned improvements in social security system didn't come into being because during Ahmedinejad's presidency ministry of welfare was closed after two years that being established in order to prevent inflation of bureaucratic system. Ahmedinejad had promised improvement of welfare policies in order to assist poor and vulnerable classes of society in his electoral campaigns. He attracted mass of people by these promises.

Populist politicians like Ahmedinejad benefited of welfare policies as motivational tactics for mass attraction but after he won election campaign he decreased subsidies by subsidy reform projects. Different health care projects like pregnancy prevention policies were stopped in Health Care Centers and Women development centers were converted to family development centers. Also, welfare ministry was closed in order to reduce financial load of the government.

Populist politicians like Ahmedinejad used welfare policies as motivational strategies in order to get in contact with poor classes of the society and after he achieved his goal and he became president he didn't follow his promises. During presidency of Ahmedinejad welfare policies were decreased. Neoliberal policies were conducted and vulnerable classes left helpless in free market condition.

Legatum Prosperity index shows no improvement in life conditions of Iranians during Ahmedinejad's presidency.

Legatum Prosperity Index

Prosperiy Index	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Iran	93	92	97	102	101	107

As table shows, prosperity rank of Iran has increased during presidency of Ahmedinejad. It means welfare has decreased in these years. In other words it can be mentioned that welfare policies which were conducted in populist context didn't improve life conditions of poor. But they benefited politicians in order to gain power and remove rivals in political competitions.

8. Conclusion

Dominant discourse in society would determine policy making process. And different political contexts would behave in a way to satisfy the needs of society. Populism as communicative rhetoric would get in touch with poor people by promises that would improve life conditions by welfare policies. Populism with different promises would defraud mass in order to gain power. Policy making in

populist rhetoric doesn't attempt to improve welfare but it aims to control mass by manipulating their needs.

References

- Abutorabian, H. (1999). *Dictators, Press, Goat and Sheep* (pp. 29-31). Noormags.
- Albertazzi, D., & McDonnell, D. (1988). *Twenty First Century Populism, the Spectrum of Western European Democracy* (pp. 1-264). Milan: Palgrave Mc.
- Anderson, J. E. (2003). *Public Policy Making: An Introduction* (pp. 1-34). Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company.
- Brown, D. A. (1996). *Invisibility Factor: The Limits of Public Choice Theory and Public Institutions* (Vol. 74, pp. 1-45).
- Caplau, B., Stringham, E., & Mises, B. (2005). *Public Opinion and Public Choice* (pp. 1-48). Fayetteville: Fayetteville State University.
- Cochran, C. L., & Malone, E. F. (2005). *Public Policy: Perspectives and Choices* (pp. 1-32). Boulder: Lynne Publisher.
- Canovan, M. (1999). *Trust the People! Populism and Two Faces of Democracy* (Vol. 47, pp. 2-16). Keel University Political Studies.
- De Jasper, R., Hollanders, D., & Krouel, A. (2004) *Varieties of Populism: An Analysis of Programmatic Character of Six European Parties* (pp. 1-28). Amsterdam: Department of Political Science.
- Gauvin Eric, J. (1998). *The Triumph of Public Choice over Public Policy* (pp. 1-43). Faculty Publication Western New England University of Law.
- Gidron, N., & Bonikowski, B. (2004). *Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda* (No. 13-0004, pp. 1-39). Harvard Publication for International Affairs. <http://www.wcfia.harvard.edu>
- Hajjariyan, S. (1985) *Inharmonious Process of Political Development in Peripheral Countries* (pp. 23-76). Noormags Publication.
- Hawkins, K. A. (2007). *Is Chavez Populist? Measuring Populist Discourse in Comparative Discourse* (pp. 1-34). International Congress of Latin America Studies.
- Jagers, J., & Walgrave, S. (2007). Populism as Political Communication Style: An Empirical Study of Political Parties' Discourse in Belgium. *European Journal of Political Research*, 46, 319-345. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00690.x>
- Johnson, R. S. (2011). *Populist Mobilization: A New Approach to Populism* (pp. 1-96). University of Michigan.
- Krill, C., & Tosun, J. (2008). *Policy Making* (pp. 495-512). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Laclau, E. (2005). *On Populist Reason* (pp. 1-130). New York, NY: Verso.
- Matthijis, R. (2010). *Measuring Populism in Comparative Research* (pp. 1-28). Two Content Analysis Methods Compared, Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research.
- Taggart, P. (2007). The Populist Politics of Euroscepticism. In *The Fifth Biennial Conference of European Community* (pp. 1-26). University of Sussex.
- Torre, C. (2013). The People, Populism and the Leaders Semi-Embodied Power. *Rubrica Contemporena*, 2, 1-16.
- Waldo, E. R. (1929). "Power" in *Complete Writings* (p. 541). New York, NY: Wise and Co.
- Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and Literature* (pp. 1-224). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Submit or recommend next manuscript to SCIRP and we will provide best service for you:

Accepting pre-submission inquiries through Email, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.

A wide selection of journals (inclusive of 9 subjects, more than 200 journals)

Providing 24-hour high-quality service

User-friendly online submission system

Fair and swift peer-review system

Efficient typesetting and proofreading procedure

Display of the result of downloads and visits, as well as the number of cited articles

Maximum dissemination of your research work

Submit your manuscript at: <http://papersubmission.scirp.org/>

Or contact ojps@scirp.org