

What Do 'the People' Want? Analysing Online Populist Challenges to Europe

Initiative: Herausforderungen für Europa

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Digital media are the most important way in which populism is promoted as they allow populist politicians, parties, and movements to bypass the mainstream media which they perceive as biased against them. It remains unclear, however, how widespread and impactful populist concerns are among online audiences or the general public. In the project, digital traces are used to (1) map what 'the people' want, (2) analyze whether and why they want similar or different things across Europe, and (3) investigate the effects of exposure to online populist grievances on (offline) political outcomes. In providing answers to these questions, the project aims at improving the understanding of the societal (macro) and the social-psychological (micro) processes behind the rise of populism. It is guided by the hypothesis that online populist grievances, i.e., the communication of and exposure to populist complaints, may constitute both a challenge and a corrective for representative democracies and need to be examined in all their complexity. The project focuses on countries with varying vote shares for left- or right-wing populist parties and where populists form part of the government (Poland and the U.S.), constitute a middle-sized block in parliament (Germany and Sweden), are not represented in parliament (the UK), or form a strong opposition (France, Italy, and Spain). The research period starts in October 2018 and features at least one election in all countries, including the European Parliament election. The project relies on existing data to account for the context of populism (political, economic, cultural, media systems) and generates novel data to assess the societal embeddedness of populism.

Projektbeteiligte

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