

Much of the existing literature on right-wing populist/extremist/etc. movements in the developing world emphasizes globalization and the market position of the countries in question as explanations for the turn to the right. These explanations are troubled by the fact that the same set of factors have been used in the past to explain socialist and otherwise left-leaning political movements such as Latin America's "pink tide." Perhaps the current right-wing movements are successful because voters have come to believe that socialists and other leftists collaborate too much with globalization or failed to adequately combat globalization-caused poverty? In any case, such arguments are widely available. One particularly clear version is offered by de Oliveira (2019), but see more generally the literature discussed in Retzl (2023). In particular, there is some evidence from Latin America that citizens may turn toward rightist identities and movements because of dissatisfaction with how left-leaning governments failed to reduce poverty given the constraints of the global economy (Junge 2019, Naím 2015; Pinheiro-Machado and Mury Scalco 2020).

A second set of perhaps surprising hypotheses involves the relative victory of democracy as a regime type. Because right-leaning and right-wing actors in much of the world cannot easily take power through military coups or other authoritarian strategies without facing serious costs, the argument goes, they now – perhaps for the first time, in some countries – must organize parties, civil-society movements, and generally develop a proper political right wing (Mayka and Smith 2021).

As in much of the rest of the world, researchers believe that the right wing in the developing world is strengthened and perhaps causally reinforced by the structure of contemporary and recent social media networks (Gold and Pena 2021, Romancini 2019). The hypothesis is that social media facilitates the far right by reducing the costs of organization, communication, and recruitment, and may also tend toward emotional and ideological extremes in a way that reinforces messages at political extremes. For movements that, in the developing world, have historically been strongly associated with elite actors, there may be powerful benefits in being able to build a grass-roots support base through social media. The structure of the network allows wealthy individuals to pay to disseminate their message in ways that may not be as obvious to readers as in other media, which right-wing voices in the developing world have done (Riquelme et al 2022) and which may be unusually beneficial.

There is some research suggesting that news about topics like abortion, same-sex marriage, and transgender politics can reduce the importance of economic issues for some Latin Americans, thereby increasing the attractiveness of far-right positions. Smith and Boas (2020) have probably the best evidence on this dimension, but it remains understudied. Ravecca et al. (2023) show that there is substantial evidence connecting these themes with economic right-wing perspectives, and that they are a major part of the picture beyond survey and laboratory evidence.

Finally, there is a limited literature about whether there is a global, regional, or other right-wing wave and whether there are meaningful transnational linkages across the movements in question. First, there is substantial debate about whether the right-wing movements of the developing world are really right-wing, really populist, really right-wing populist, the same kind of right-wing populist as each other, and so forth. This kind of conceptual analysis is a healthy and standard part of comparative politics and is the leading edge of this kind of empirical phenomenon. (See Kestler 2022, Zanotti and Roberts 2021, Zanotti, Rama, and Tanscheit 2021, Salgado and Sandrin 2021). If there is a right-wing wave, we should ask what its causes are, and whether there are organizational and strategic networks underlying it. While there is not a great deal of recent empirical research on this question, there are some older empirical and theoretical perspectives that help frame thinking about this issue (Bob 2012, Chase-Dunn and Dudley 2018).