Received: 1 September 2023 | Revised: 2 February 2024 | Accepted: 6 February 2024

DOI: 10.1111/gec3.12738

REVIEW ARTICLE

WILEY

The rise of 'infrastructural populism': Urban infrastructure and right-wing politics

Ross Beveridge[1] | Matthias Naumann[2] | David Rudolph[3]

[1]Urban Studies, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK

[2]Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR), Cottbuss, Germany

[3]Department of Wind and Energy Systems, Technical University of Denmark, Lyngby, Denmark

Correspondence
Ross Beveridge.
Email: ross.beveridge@glasgow.ac.uk

Abstract

Right-wing populism has become increasingly embedded in contemporary political systems. It poses challenges not only for societies but also for geographical analysis. This review article develops a fresh perspective through examining how right-wing populists are engaging with urban infrastructure. Examining the literature on populism and urban infrastructure we outline 'infrastructural populism', a general heuristic to understand an emerging agenda of right-wing politics. Four political fields are identified: (i) urban infrastructure as a field of morals to frame the 'people' and the 'elite', (ii) urban infrastructure as a field of ideological struggle, (iii) urban infrastructure as a field of national statecraft and (iv) urban infrastructure as a field of everyday practices and politics. The review throws new light on right-wing populism by showing how central infrastructure is becoming to its contemporary articulations, and how the inherently elusive and extensive qualities of populism result in often contradictory political agendas that are both aligned with and articulated against existing politics of urban infrastructure.

KEYWORDS
infrastructure, political geography, political theory, populism, right-wing, urban geography, urban politics

1 | INTRODUCTION

In June 2023, several thousand people in the Bavarian town of Erding joined a rally against the plans of the German federal government to advance more sustainable heating and energy use, most notably the mandatory introduction of heat pumps. The protest was not only attended by the First Minister of Bavaria, Markus Söder (*Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern*), who was then verbally attacked by the protesters, but also attracted the support of the far-right party, AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*) and gained a lot of media coverage (Hermanski, 2023). The example illustrates how energy infrastructures have become a key issue for right-wing populists, mobilising parts of society formerly seen as far beyond their traditional base of supporters. Decay, inequalities, as well as systemic transformations of urban infrastructures have become triggers for right-wing populists and their mobilisations of the 'people' against the 'elite'. Urban geography literatures have long emphasised the political nature of infrastructure, often in relation to subaltern and progressive movements. Research on right wing politics and urban infrastructure is less apparent but increasing. In this article we address this emerging debate, bringing scholarship on political urban infrastructures into conversation with both geography and political science literatures on right-wing populism. We ask: how far can we discern an 'infrastructural populism'? That is, to what extent is urban infrastructure becoming a focus of right-wing populists? And, going further, in what ways is right wing populism, both ideologically and as a policy agenda, finding expression in urban infrastructures, as both discursive field and socio-material context?

Populism provides complex challenges to both contemporary societies and political-spatial analysis. Right-wing populist parties and movements are a growing phenomenon in many countries, but their ultimate meaning is often elusive and this is in part because they align with as well as attack existing political ideologies, policies and practices (Anderson & Secor, 2022). Key scholars of populism like Mudde (2004) have argued that there is no encompassing ideology of populism: even in its right-wing varieties it is aligning with complex and often contradictory political-economic currents—state interventionism, protectionism as well as the free market. From a different theoretical perspective, Laclau (2005) claimed that populism rested on an empty signifier, for example, the nation(alism) through which individuals can come to identify a 'people'. Such perspectives instruct us to see right-wing populism as an adaptive and thus multiple as well as potentially contradictory set of political formations. Hence populism, despite its core constellation of the people versus the elite in the formation of a general will, cannot be understood as a homogenous political project. Regardless of the familiar grandstanding statements on, for example, immigration and nation, right-wing populism may be politically capacious, even if strongly contextualised.

Against this background, we explore right-wing populism as a set of varying and contingent political projects that appeal to, evoke even, a 'people' by constituting them in opposition to the influence of a political, increasingly globalised elite and aligning hostile forces (usually immigrants). The people and enemy are delineated, to varying degrees, on nationalist, nativist, racist, xenophobic and misogynistic grounds but their mobilisation and political meanings are morphable. We use the term 'right-wing' rather than 'far-right' to capture the broader spectrum of populism occupying this terrain. We are mainly focused on political parties because of the notable shifts towards populist strategies, tropes and policies. Our broader focus on the right has the advantage of bringing right-of-centre, and often larger, political parties under the same analytical lens as the far right, revealing the spread of nativist populism within political systems. Such a move seems very necessary given the way parties like the UK Conservatives have increasingly adopted the rhetoric and policies, for example, on immigration, once associated with the far-right.

Populism also has to be located as a range of spatial-material projects. Ultimately, its meanings are generated from engagements with particular political contexts and societal fields. This explains why populism is no longer a concern of political scientists alone (e.g. Urbinati, 2019), but increasingly of geographers (e.g. Anderson & Secor, 2022; Ince, 2019; Luger, 2022). Indeed, human geographers have made crucial interventions in debates on populism along these lines, with questions about *where* populism succeeds, now clearly interwoven with the more standard questions of *why* and *how* it does so (Agnew & Shin, 2017; Förtner et al., 2021; Lizotte, 2019). In particular,

there has been a recent call for greater attention to the local dimension of populism that points to urban areas as targets of the populist right (Chou et al., 2022; Mullis, 2021; Nettelbladt, 2023). However, manifestations of right-wing populism in urban settings have been less evident and so far mainly approached from the perspective of electoral geographies (Fainstein & Novy, 2023).

Our main objective in this paper is to extend existing debates on right-wing populism within geography by delineating a field of what we term 'infrastructural populism'. For this purpose, we trace four ways in which right-wing populists are engaging with infrastructure: (i) infrastructure as a field of morals, (ii) infrastructure as an ideological struggle, (iii) infrastructure as national statecraft and (iv) infrastructure as part of everyday practices and politics.

The paper has the following structure: Section 2 details debates on right-wing populism as an elusive yet extensive way of conducting politics, in which the exclusionary formations of the people in relation to an elite and non-people are fluid. Section 3 examines the political nature of infrastructures as detailed so cogently in urban geography. Section 4 brings together insights from the literatures on right-wing populism and urban infrastructures to outline an approach to "infrastructural populism". We conclude the paper with reflections on the connections between urban infrastructure and populism as well as their relevance for urban geography and moves to counter right-wing populism.

2 | RIGHT-WING POPULISM: ELUSIVE AND EXTENSIVE

Populism is a slippery and much debated term, associated predominantly with the right, but over the last decade, also increasingly with the left (Mouffe, 2018). Therefore, it is necessary to contextualise manifestations of populism to be able to capture its diverse articulations. The foundation of populism (be that of right and left) is the cleavage between the 'people', seen as good and the rightful beneficiaries of political systems, and the 'elite', commonly construed as the corrupt and self-interested enemy of the people. Populism plays to a notion of the victimisation of ordinary people that are exposed to, and threatened by, forces that are deemed harmful to their interests. Hence, populism is based on two central ideas of anti-elitism and people-centrism (Mudde, 2004) and can be understood as an appeal to a more-or-less delineated people against established power relations and the perceived dominant beliefs, values and ideas of a society (Canovan, 1999). Populism is characterised by a strongly "moralistic imagination of politics", which positions a "pure" people against its enemies and the elite (Müller, 2014, p. 485) and commonly encompasses a suspicion of experts, an appeal to direct action with the promise of simple and quick solutions to complex problems (McCarthy, 2019). Right-wing populism is characterised by a common self-legitimising understanding, raison d'être, and political style, rather than a common ideology. Right-wing populists, seek divisions to articulate exclusionary formations of the people based on nativist principles, racialized ideals and racial prejudices. Such a delineation of the people is not found in left -wing populism, which tends to foreground economic and social inequalities within society. However, this is not to say that right wing populists do not engage with socio-economic issues, but rather that they may seek to merge them with nationalist and nativist imaginaries. There have been right-wing engagements with distributive conflicts alongside the propagation of nationalist versus cosmopolitan worldviews (Canovan, 1999; Lockwood, 2018).

Overall, two elements appear integral to an understanding of right-wing populism. First, the literature identifies a number of closely aligned forms of right-wing populism with similar characteristics that are hard to separate, but whose demarcations are still fluid. Right-wing populism tends to accuse governing elites of putting internationalism ahead of the nation and international interests ahead of the people, who are delineated along nativist and nationalist lines (Fraune & Knodt, 2018). As such, right-wing populists combine ethno-nationalist xenophobia with anti-establishment rhetoric. Hence, right-wing populism is often associated with 'nativist populism', the homogeneity of the people, the nation and nationality (Harris, 2020). In nativist populism 'nefarious minorities' are portrayed as the source of injustices and corruption in societies (Lockwood, 2018). Atkins and Menga (2022, p. 225)

identify the othering of, and a hostility towards, immigrants and foreigners, ethnic minorities, minority sexual orientations and scientific groups as further common features of right-wing populism. Ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and anti-immigration stances align with an authoritarianism that advocates for a strong nation state that favours the interests of the so-called native people.

Second, it thus speaks to and incorporates authoritarian relations. 'Authoritarian populism', introduced by Hall (1985), describes a political struggle between the people and some sort of malevolent, racialized, and unfairly advantaged group of 'others', which is seen as justifying strong, anti-democratic measures to take back control in favour of the people (Scoones et al., 2018). Hall was writing about the emergence of Thatcherism in late 1970s and early 1980s United Kingdom and was particularly focused on how 'crisis' (socio-economic, political) was constructed as a political terrain by the right, creating dividing lines, with enemies of the nation, such as the then still powerful trade unions, who were to be subjected to the strong arm of the state under Margaret Thatcher's charismatic leadership (see also Hall, 1979). The analysis is instructive for contemporary contexts, given how multiple, interlinked and enduring crises, the so called 'poly-' and 'perma-crisis', are being used, even deepened, by right wing populists across the globe. Recent examples of authoritarian populism in power include Brazil under Bolsonaro (de Azevedo & Robertson, 2022), India (Sinha, 2021) and Turkey (Adaman & Akbulut, 2021). Right-wing populism, in its authoritarianism, seeks to eviscerate democratic institutions in order to centralise power and delimit dissent, while promising to take quick and decisive action in support of the people. Economic protectionism and cleaving to national self-interest against prevailing global interests are typical features (McCarthy, 2019) that we can trace to help grasp the right-wing populist mobilisation of urban infrastructural issues.

Paradoxically, given the aggression, prejudice and blunt-edge quality of its right-wing formulations, the advance of populism is often seen to lie in its adaptability as a political project, the extent to which it becomes aligned with other political belief systems or ideologies. In this view, populism is a 'thin-centred ideology' (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017) focused on formulation of the people and the elite as a theory of political change and rule. It cannot stand alone, it does not provide coordinates to deal with diverse social problems or to shape political programmes. From this perspective, populism is always attached to another, more pronounced and hegemonic ideology, which, in turn, informs the underlying ideas, rationales, and policies of populist forces (ibid.). As such, it often finds expression as a counterhegemonic stance in response to liberal and social democratic politics and, according to some, neoliberal capitalism (Mamonova & Franquesa, 2020). Right-wing populist politics, despite the direct, often brutal simplicity of leaders' statements and headline policies, can be a more complex brew of ideological strands, political concepts and policies. Emerging debates on "post-neoliberalism" discuss how right-wing populist forces are stretching or even dismantling elements of neoliberalism in a perpetuation of its core principles of property rights and individualism (Davies & Gane, 2021). Some have identified a right-wing neoliberal populism carrying tensions between neoliberal globalisation and anti-globalist conservatism (Kiely, 2021). The complexity extends to party politics, with some positions (especially on immigration) of right-wing populist parties becoming part of the mainstream (Brown et al., 2023).

The rise of right-wing populism is a highly differentiated spatial phenomenon. A key focus of scholarly and media interest in right-wing populism is on why right-wing populists are successful in one location and not in another. A large number of studies point to an urban-rural divide, though this neat spatial delineation has also been increasingly problematised. Rural, mostly peripheral, regions, small towns, and suburbs are usually seen as the spatial contexts in which right-wing populism tends to flourish (Mamonova & Franquesa, 2020, p. 702). Guilluy (2019) outlines a gap between liberal metropoles and reactionary villages in France. According to a recent paper, 'rural populism' might best capture the political movement upon which the electoral success of former US president Donald Trump was based (Jadhav, 2021). Berlet and Sunshine (2019) describe the 'rural rage' of White, Christian nationalist groups like the 'patriot movement' and its anti-immigrant xenophobia, islamophobia, and homophobia in the US. In relation to Norway, rural dwellers display a much less positive attitude towards migration than those living in towns and cities (Zahl-Thanem & Haugen, 2019, p. 691). Van Gent et al. (2013) focus on

the 'suburbs of populism' apparent in the Netherlands, where support for populist right-wing parties is significantly higher. Rossi (2018) emphasises the urban roots of populism in Italy, its entwinement with the housing and wider urban crisis in what he views as a 'paradigmatic case' (1426). Mullis (2021) shows how the German AfD has had success in marginalised neighbourhoods in the city of Frankfurt (Main). More fundamentally, for Ekers et al. (2020, p. 1585) Hart's (2014) work has underlined the need to avoid using binary spatial categories like the urban and rural as 'self-evident containers of politics and populism'. Harteveld et al. (2022) show for the Netherlands that the support for the far-right party PVV (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*) can be found in both rural and urban areas. Researchers should, therefore, be alert to the dangers of essentialising the rural as inevitably conservative and right-wing, and the urban as inherently progressive and left-wing (e.g. Kovács, 2022, p. 2). Although the spatiality of right-wing populism has been mainly associated with the rural and the periphery, urban areas are understood as targets for right-wing populists due to their apparent embrace of cosmopolitan values, while certain groups of marginalised urban or suburban poor are regarded as particularly susceptible to right-wing populist politics (Chou et al., 2022).

A different way of approaching right-wing populism is provided by Anderson and Secor (2022), who highlight its affective underpinnings, which have strong spatial implications but are not bound to a spatial container like the urban or rural. They propose understanding populism as available, excessive and optimistic because its discursive emptiness allows for articulations that create an affective wholeness related to returning to lost or threatened images of the past. Anderson and Secors's affective geographies approach is quite different from Mudde's ideational approach (e.g. 2004), but there are argumentative parallels to his assertion that populism is a thin-centred ideology requiring the ballast of additional political ideologies to gain purchase. The thinness of populism makes it not meagre but available, adaptable to context, able to proliferate. An implication of Anderson and Secor's (2022) arguments about the availability of right-wing populism, is that it can be persuasive, present throughout social life, even if it is strongly nationalistic in tone and geared towards political grandstanding. Luger (2022) is useful here in exploring the everyday geographies of far right encounters to better understand right-wing radicalisation: it points both to the extensiveness (being embedded in the everyday) and elusiveness of right-wing populism (how it is embroiled in more mainstream forms of political rationalities and everday life practices). Our focus on urban infrastructure, as detailed in later sections, aligns with this general concern and links to other strands of geographical literature, which stress that the spatiality and materiality of right-wing populism must be foregrounded in explanation and analysis.

3 | INFRASTRUCTURE POLITICS AND RIGHT-WING POPULISM

In human geography, infrastructures of energy, water, transport or social services have increasingly moved centre-stage in the analysis of politics, seldom seen as apolitical or a passive backdrop to social relations, whose purposes and functionalities are only problematised by technocrats. The development and governance of infrastructure is a highly political process, imbued with ideologies and tactical objectives as McFarlane and Rutherford (2008) argued in a key contribution. Striking examples include the work of von Schnitzler's (2016) on infrastructure as part of state violence in South Africa after apartheid; Barry's (2013) study of an oil pipeline to elaborate on infrastructure as an element of 'material politics'; Anand's (2017) ethnographic study of the politics of water infrastructure in Mumbai, which reveals how urban water services and citizenship are intertwined. There is a tendency in research on infrastructure in human geography to focus on progressive political mobilisation around issues of citizenship, social justice, and democracy (Becker et al., 2019; Stock, 2021; Sultana, 2020). This is understandable given the prominence of infrastructures of water and energy supply in the politics of urban social movements. However, a corrective is in order and given how right-wing populists utilise infrastructure to advance their political agendas, delineating grievances to form the 'people' against an 'elite' and further enemies. There is both empirical evidence that populists are engaging with infrastructure and intrinsic reasons for them to further do so.

A first possible explanation for the growing interrelationships between right-wing populism and urban infrastructure is the fact that socio-spatial cohesion is strongly influenced by infrastructure (Turner, 2020, p. 16). Hence, infrastructure is implicit to the order (or not) of society and inequalities within that order. Research has attempted to identify linkages in cause and effect between populism and geographies of inequality. Economic decline is seen as an explanation for growing support for right-wing populist parties. Loftus and Gort (2023, p. 278) argue: 'The production of peripheral difference should thus remain attentive to the specific—often infrastructural—relations fostering and facilitating authoritarian populist coalitions'. Essletzbichler et al.'s (2018, p. 90) analysis of election results in Austria, the United Kingdom, and the US shows that right-wing parties tend to be more successful in deindustrialising and declining regions struggling with socio-economic structural change. Adler and Ansell (2020, p. 344) claim that there is a correlation between low and declining house prices and support for Brexit in the UK and Marine Le Pen in France; that 'populism is a politics of place, and place is a product, in part, of the housing market'. Rodríguez-Pose (2018) has introduced the notion of 'places that don't matter', where long-term economic decline translates into residents using their votes to gain revenge against economic and political systems that do not offer the conditions for reasonable employment and prosperity in the places where they live. In Germany, infrastructural divides or deficits in terms of the supply of public transport, high-speed internet, and social facilities are often discussed as important factors influencing right-wing populist support (Naumann, 2021).

However, deficits in infrastructure supply are not only a cause, or trigger, for the increasing support for right-wing populist parties. Beyond providing grounds for grievances about deficient infrastructure and political neglect, infrastructure provides right-wing populists with a means of advancing, materially and discursively, their nationalist projects. Donald Trump's 'Make America Great' plans included a clear emphasis on expanding and rebuilding infrastructure, especially in poor rural areas (where Trump tended to draw much of his support) (Miller, 2017). Infrastructure policy, investment, expansion, and so on, can be utilised to advance right-wing populist causes such as the advance/defence of car transportation. On the face of it, such rhetoric might also be seen as directed against urban areas, with their metropolitan liberal elites and anti-car movements. However, as noted above, we should approach spatial delineators of populism, such as urban/rural, with care, understanding how the availability of populism is drawing support through creating divisions within, between and across a diversity of urban and rural contexts.

A second reason right-wing populists are increasingly engaging with infrastructure is their positioning of climate change and environment as a decisive field of struggle with elites and the perceived enemies of the people. Climate change mitigation and adaptation, and energy transitions from fossil fuels require fundamental infrastructural change as well adjustments in social practices of, for instance, mobility or energy use. Emblematic in urban areas is the resistance to car reduction policies and the conspiracy theories surrounding the notion of the '15 Minute City', the latest in a line of planning concepts aiming to reduce the need for travel within urban areas whilst increasing neighbourhood liveability. Atkins and Menga (2022) highlight the dismissal of climate science and the rejection of environmental policy as characteristic of right-wing populism (see additionally Bosworth, 2022). Typically, this includes outright climate change denialism (Jylhä & Hellmer, 2020) and scepticism (Lockwood, 2018), presenting obstacles to international efforts towards climate change mitigation by emphasising nationalist over global interests. In a different vein, Cortes-Vasquez (2020) unveils an increased right-wing populist reframing of nature conservation policies by scapegoating public management of conservation for any shortcomings and positioning the private economic interests of landowners as the popular interests of rural communities. Özen (2022) examines the discursive production of the people against environmental movements in Turkey. In a recent study, Küppers (2022) shows how climate change scepticism builds an important strategic field for the German AfD. Atkins (2022) discusses the different ways right-wing populist narratives, rather than expressing an explicit denial of climate change, challenge decarbonisation policies and related low-carbon infrastructures in the UK. Daggett (2018) coined the term 'petro-masculinity' to refer to a social identity combining climate change denial, racism, machismo and misogyny, which also finds material expression in certain transport infrastructures (automobiles) whilst denigrating others (buses, trains, collective forms of transport) (Nelson, 2020). Against this background of

TABLE 1 Right-wing populist engagement with urban infrastructure.

Technical infrastructure	Energy supply (Batel & Devine-Wright, 2018; Fraune & Knodt, 2018)	Resistance to urban transitions from fossil to renewable energy sources
	Public transport (Filion, 2011; Kiss et al., 2020)	Supporting car infrastructures against efforts for more public urban transport and bicycle use
Social infrastructure	Housing (Adler & Ansell, 2020; Waldron, 2021)	Campaigns against accommodation for refugees
	Schools and health care (Hussain & Yunus, 2021; Peker, 2021; Speed & Mannion, 2020)	Exclusive access for 'native' people
Institutional infrastructure	Public administration (Peters & Pierre, 2019)	Protests against diversity and gender awareness in public service provision
	Urban policing and urban planning (Fainstein & Novy, 2023; Filion, 2011; Trapenberg Frick, 2021)	Opposition to democratic control and sustainable infrastructure planning

Source: Authors compilation.

volatile political activity, McCarthy (2019, p. 302) has called attention to 'the myriad connections between authoritarianism, populism, and environmental politics and governance'.

Environmental and climate issues have therefore constituted a significant frontier for right-wing populist forces. This opens up fundamental questions about the role of urban infrastructure in the advance of right-wing populism. Urban water, waste, transportation and most particularly energy infrastructures can be seen as contested fields for the projections of right-wing populism. Wanvik and Haarstad (2021) consider the right-wing populist resurgence against local energy transition as merely ruptures and instabilities that are inherent in the contingencies of assembling and disassembling such fundamental social-technical change. Research has shed light on the struggles between renewable and fossil fuel industries (Knuth, 2019) and between different pathways and infrastructures of energy transitions (Batel & Devine-Wright, 2018), as well as between the maintenance and abolition of fossil fuel infrastructures (Kojola, 2019). Dechézelles and Scotti (2022) discuss conflicts around renewable energies in France and Italy as an expression of 'energy populism'. Despite such compelling examples, there is a need for precision in analysing the ways right-wing populists utilise infrastructures to articulate their nationalist and exclusionary objectives, because their engagements might be more or less pragmatic or mainstream as well as nativist or nationalist.

Table 1, based on extant literature, illustrates a very brief selection of possible fields of urban infrastructure which can become issues for right-wing populist mobilisation. As mentioned above, populism is a flexible ideology which can vary according to national as well as local and regional contexts.

Drawing on this literature summary, we now outline a heuristic approach to understanding what we call 'infrastructural populism'.

4 | FROM INFRASTRUCTURE POLITICS TO 'INFRASTRUCTURAL POPULISM'

The previous section outlined how and why right-wing populists are engaging in urban infrastructure. This section draw together key conceptual and empirical insights from the literatures on populism and urban infrastructure politics to outline four fields of 'infrastructural populism': the interconnections between urban infrastructure and right-wing populism:

i) urban infrastructure as a field of morals,
ii) urban infrastructure as a field of ideological struggle,
iii) urban infrastructure as a field of national statecraft,
iv) urban infrastructure as a field of everyday practices and politics.

These fields should be seen as overlapping and closely interconnected with each other. Taken together, they delineate a terrain where right-wing populist ideologies, strategies and policies confront, are shaped by and, in turn, try to shape, the governance structures, social practices and materiality of urban infrastructure.

4.1 | Urban infrastructure as a field of morals

Urban infrastructure politics can be seen as unevenly embroiled with what the political theorist Müller (2014, p. 485) calls the 'moralistic imagination of politics'. Most particularly, moral and exclusionary understandings of infrastructure that are linked to national ambitions and objectives resonate with the development of urban transport, water and energy systems within the global economy and its generation of spatial inequalities, winners and losers. Whether absent, deficient, or abundant, urban infrastructures of, for example, sanitation, transportation and energy, are pivotal to modern modes of human life. These infrastructures contribute to the perception and meaning of a place, with poor infrastructure provision easily becoming a symbol for wider decline. Urban infrastructures can unify and divide people as well as areas—they are central to the making of urban political geographies. Populist strategies to divide societies can easily build on this. As Lemanski (2020) reminds us, infrastructure always produces and reproduces social, political, and spatial inequalities. Urban infrastructure systems and services differentiate between people, creating groups that include and exclude (Lesutis, 2022), which create and deepen political-spatial divisions. For example, hot and cold spots of infrastructure provision emerged as logics of profit and efficiency savings slice up cities into winners and losers (Guy et al., 1997). Right wing populists can engage with the uneven outcomes of neoliberal infrastructural governance, say the emergence of 'places that don't matter', their populism available, presenting a struggle in the name of the people against the elites and their accomplices. If the thinness (Mudde, 2004) of populist ideology means it is adaptable (and hence available), the actual engagements with neoliberalism might also be contradictory, at once denigrating elites beholden to global capital and seeking further market solutions in related policy areas. In particular, it is the presence of stark inequalities that advance of right-wing populism, allowing often genuine socio-economic grievances to be set out in relation to the 'people' and their 'enemies'. Moralising tones of right and wrong are utilised to imbue this division with intensity and narrative. Furthermore, the inadequacies of infrastructure are inadequacies of government and policy—hence they provide an obvious Faultline between the people and the elite. Typical narratives centre on 'we', be it the 'ordinary' people, the owners of 'our country', those adhering to 'our way of life', the rightful users of our sovereign energy resources. Such moralistic nativism can ultimately take form in policies aimed at protecting urban infrastructure from immigrants, the appeal to national pride related to infrastructures, and the generation of a benefit for the so-called 'native people'.

4.2 | Urban infrastructure as a field of ideological struggle

Earlier we noted that right-wing populism has an ideological malleability beyond its basic focus on nativist, exclusionary notions of the people. Mudde's (2004) notion of populism's thin ideology appears borne out by the empirical illustrations above where urban infrastructure becomes a field in which right-wing populist parties position themselves both with and against prevailing beliefs and rationalities. Urban infrastructure, as well as having material impacts on the quality of people's lives, can be understood as a field in which political ideologies can be

articulated, contested, and made material (McFarlane & Rutherford, 2008). As Moss' (2020) study of Berlin's turbulent modern infrastructure history starkly reveals, ideologies are inscribed in infrastructure systems, be they fascist, liberal, or socialist. In Weimar Berlin, for instance, the city's electricity, gas, water, and sanitation infrastructures can be seen as important not only for providing basic needs but also as a socio-materiality shaped by and shaping urban politics and democracy (ibid., p. 62). The current debates on sustainable transitions in urban energy supply and mobility are also about fundamental belief systems, with struggles between those who accept the urgent reality of the climate emergency and those intent on the preservation of a fossil fuel lifestyle as typified in petro-masculinity (Daggett, 2018). For right-wing populists, urban infrastructure can be important as a means of making populist ideology available (returning to Anderson and Secor's (2022) term). Urban infrastructures offer a means of delineating policy interventions, possibly relating right wing populism to other ideologies (referring to Mudde's (2004) idea that populism is a thin ideology), locating populist causes in relation to wider political ideologies of (post-)neoliberalism, prescribing populist approaches to the market and public goods, opposing leftist and green infrastructure politics.

4.3 | Urban infrastructure as a field of national statecraft

Right-wing populism in its current forms centres on the nation and nationalism. As well as the aggressive and moralistic (see above) assertion of the 'people' along nativist lines (Harris, 2020), the examples detailed here show that right-wing populist parties are keen to show how statecraft can be used in their version of the nation, should they be able to take control of it. Urban infrastructure is a key terrain of state power and policymaking. Infrastructures are central to the establishment of nation states and its institutions, materially as well as symbolically. Infrastructure systems contribute to the production of nation states, as they are part of a nation state's territorialisation, its demarcation, and discursive contestations (Schindler & Kanai, 2021). States need a functioning infrastructure system 'to enable them to control, secure, integrate, grow and render sustainable the territorial space the state occupies' (Turner, 2020, p. 23f.). Urban infrastructure projects, thus, function as political projects of 'order-making' advanced by states (Lesutis, 2022). Urban development and spatial cohesion are strongly influenced by infrastructure (Turner, 2020, p. 16). Different aspects of infrastructure supply, such as access to medical care and high-speed internet, energy supply, and national train connections are important indicators of spatial disparities. Given the inequalities and grievances associated with these (see above), urban infrastructure becomes a means of creating new winners and losers within a nation, a way of advancing a general will of the people. Urban infrastructures have strategic importance as well as symbolic value. Urban infrastructures are also currently highly contested: they are a field of political struggle where right wing populists can position themselves as defenders of the people. Current efforts to advance sustainability transitions are posed mainly as infrastructural challenges, and linked closely to urban systems. Urban infrastructure is then a means of demonstrating capacity to govern the nation state and to govern it differently to the elite.

4.4 | Urban infrastructure as a field of everyday practices and politics

Technical, social and institutional infrastructures are fundamental to everyday life and often provide the material embodiments of inequalities, grievances, and, hence, the conditions for political mobilisation. Infrastructure co-constitutes 'the everyday spaces and political infrastructures that make populism possible' (Featherstone & Karaliotas, 2019, p. 35). Following Anderson and Secor's (2022) affective take on right-wing populism, we can say that infrastructures are bound up with the availability of right-wing populism throughout urban everyday life (Luger, 2022). Indeed, we may want to (re)consider the notion of infrastructure itself in these articulations. Simone's (2004) notion of 'people as infrastructure', while not at all developed to capture right-wing populist

formations, can be helpful in that it illustrates how infrastructure goes far beyond technical networks and formal institutions. Instead, it entails the informal, sometimes subversive practices of people organising their daily lives. This applies not only for cities of the Global South but as Wilson (2022) recently elaborates also for the Global North. Luger's (2022, p. 102604) everyday geographies of the far right throws light on the 'encounters, socialisation, recreation and leisure' occurring through 'daily processes, moments and spatial configurations'. Urban infrastructures are not only part of everyday experiences—people also shape their own infrastructures. The urban everyday can be seen, as Beveridge and Koch (2023) argue, as a terrain and a resource for politics, a field of political struggle. Everyday practices and politics of infrastructure can also thus become a field for right-wing populist politics, in which the affects of infrastructure as well as infrastructures of affect (Bosworth, 2023) are politically crucial. We witness right-wing populists creating their own affective infrastructures in cities, for example, through setting up social media channels, generating meangingful places for political events or information centres (for Germany see Naumann, 2021, p. 217f). Through these means right wing populist parties seek and gain presence in everyday life practices and they have played a crucial role in the protests, like those in the Bavarian town of Erding mentioned at the beginning.

5 | CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A RESEARCH AGENDA ON 'INFRASTRUCTURAL POPULISM'

This review of the literature has shown that urban infrastructure is not immune to being co-opted and politicised by right-wing populism. It has become an object of political projects and, in turn, it has shaped those projects. Issues of nation and immigration are, of course, still much more prevalent in the public statements and electoral programmes of right-wing populists. However, the pervasiveness of urban infrastructure, its position in everyday life and the basic functioning of the city and nation, makes it a crucial to mobilising support for nationalist and nativist causes. We have identified infrastructural populism as a field of morals, as a field of ideological struggle, as a field of national statecraft and as a field of everyday practices and politics. As the examples and table above show, the development of energy and transport infrastructure, the provision of social infrastructure and the management of public infrastructure are being politicised by right-wing populist parties in order to emphasise an alleged need for national resilience against global forces and to articulate exclusionary formations of (un)deserving people, while promoting homogeneity within national society.

Infrastructural populism can promote exclusionary redistributive and protectionist goals ambiguously situated between the embrace of and resistance to market forces. These knotty expressions of infrastructural populism require further empirical investigation and can be usefully linked to ongoing debates in human geography and the wider social sciences on post-neoliberalism, spatial inequalities and contemporary protest movements. A more detailed engagement with right-wing populist parties' framings of various policy areas would reveal the often vague and sometimes contradictory statements and rationales of right-wing populists. As Atkins and Menga (2022, p. 224) remind us populism 'can vary from country to country and populist to populist'. Comparative analysis of right-wing populist politics in different fields of infrastructure, at different scales and in diverse locales, could help uncover the contradictions, deficiencies and malleability of right-wing populist promises. Areas of interest might include the crypto-finance sector, populist-evangelical movements in the Global North and South, leisure infrastructures like shooting ranges and the co-optation of sports facilities.

There is scope to deepen the emerging dialogue between geography and the wider scholarship on right wing populism. We have emphasised the elusive and extensive qualities of right-wing populism. Focusing on urban infrastructure provides one way of identifying right-wing populism as a set of contingent spatial-material projects. More research is needed that examines the material and discursive production, utilisation, and instrumentalisation of different urban infrastructures by right-wing populists, especially in spatial terms: how is infrastructure related to places, as well as wider urban and regional contexts? Knowing right-wing populism as diverse and malleable

spatial-material projects, provides ground to better counter the propagation of exclusionary and nativist articulations of the people. It is to be hoped that researching infrastructure in this way can aid the development of progressive and inclusive strategies to counter right-wing populism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to than the Editor, Mark Davidson, and the reviewers for their very helpful engagements with the paper.

ORCID

Ross Beveridge https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1121-7083

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Dr Ross Beveridge is a Senior Lecturer in Urban Studies at the University of Glasgow. He is an interdisciplinary urbanist, democracy and the city, urban activism and the state, municipalism, urban politics of environment, climate and infrastructure, public space, goods and ownership, German urban politics and theories of urban politics

Dr Matthias Naumann is an advisor at the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR) in Germany. He is a geographer whose main research interests are urban and regional development, the transformation of infrastructures, urban politics, geography of rural areas and political geography.

David Rudolph is a Senior Researcher, in the Department of Wind and Energy Systems at the Technical University of Denmark. He is a geographer focusing on the socio-spatial implications of energy transition, with research interests revolving around the social, spatial and political-economic dynamics of expanding renewable energy technologies as well as their impacts and possibilities for the livelihoods of communities, particularly in rural areas.

How to cite this article: Beveridge, R., Naumann, M., & Rudolph, D. (2024). The rise of 'infrastructural populism': Urban infrastructure and right-wing politics. *Geography Compass*, e12738. https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12738