Abstract

This paper introduces a novel computational approach to measure populism, addressing the challenges faced by traditional methods to study populist rhetoric. Using over 100 party manifestos from 10 Spanish-speaking Latin American countries, spanning from 2000 onward, this study employs quantitative text analysis and machine learning techniques to predict levels of populism from political text. This method is generalizable, scalable, and does not require labor or resource-intensive processes, and it goes beyond previous computational solutions by providing a continuous measure of populism.

As an application, this paper explores the relationship between populism, anti-elitism, and people-centrism in Latin America and Europe, providing evidence that, in Latin America, the anti-elitism component might not be as salient or defining of instances of populism as it has been previously suggested in the literature. The impact of this finding is significant, considering that the anti-elitist stance is present in even the most minimal definitions of the populist phenomenon. Thus, this study calls for a re-examination of the characteristics of populism outside Western contexts [1]

Keywords: measuring populism, Latin America, quantitative text analysis, natural language processing, machine learning

1. Online appendices, supplementary materials, and replication files can be found at: https://github.com/sarabcidf.