



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on March 1, 2024

## Is Populism a Force for Freedom, or for Tyranny?

With Donald Trump as the Republican Party's nominee in all but name and the MAGA wing increasingly cementing its place as the dominant force in the party, the 45th president's detractors — both within the GOP and outside of it — are throwing around the term “populism” to decry what they consider to be a subversive force in the country.

Trump critics accuse him and his supporters of excessive populism that prioritizes jingoism, religious fanaticism, and sheer ignorance over orderly administration and working within established institutions to solve complex issues.



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Before he dropped out of the presidential race, former Vice President Mike Pence [described](#) the Republican primary as “a choice ... will we be the party of conservatism, or will we follow the siren song of populism unmoored to conservative principles?”

Pence went on to tout ideals like “traditional moral values” and “limited government,” thus asserting that such principles run counter to the alleged “populism” of Trump.

Contrary to Pence's dichotomy, populism is not necessarily incompatible with the conservative principles he enumerated. But he was correct in one thing — noting the populist element of the MAGA movement. The question is whether populism is a positive or negative force in American politics.

The question can get muddled because there is a lack of consensus over just what populism is. As in Pence's case, many of those who employ it in mainstream political discussions do so as a pejorative, as little more than a synonym for demagoguery. Naturally, appealing to the base instincts of the masses to persuade them to surrender rights and freedoms is destructive. But this assumes that populism and demagoguery are one and the same, when a deeper look makes it apparent that there are major distinctions.

Some political theorists posit that populism is not an ideology at all, but merely an approach, style, or even tactic in which politicians ingratiate themselves with the common man in order to build popular support for a particular program — a program that can be right-wing (lower taxes, Christian morality) or left-wing (big government regulations, legalized debauchery).

In line with this train of thought is the fact that in elective systems — especially in the United States — politicians nearly always try to justify their desired policies by painting them as being favored by and benefiting “the people.” Republicans claim lowering taxes will improve the lives of middle America, while Democrats make the same argument to support raising taxes. The GOP says the majority of America believes in the sanctity of life, while Democrats say the majority believes in access to abortion.

Clearly, when a politician's fortunes depend on his ability to persuade a majority of voters, the logical tactic is to tailor one's message to the sensibilities of the masses. It would be political suicide for a



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candidate to outright claim his proposals would benefit only a small cadre of wealthy elite at the cost of the rest of the population.

Nevertheless, upon closer inspection, it can be determined that populism *is* a political philosophy or ideology, albeit one that is inherently neutral on several polemic issues, allowing for it to be leveraged by both Right and Left.

Ultimately, populism is nothing short of an ideology that places the common people as supreme; it is a system in which society is divided between the good and virtuous common folk on one hand, and the corrupt, decadent elites on the other.

The struggle between the people and the elites is the major constant to populist thought. The specifics of what the people demand in order to improve their lives changes with the times and circumstances — in the past it was bimetallism, regulation of the railroads, clean water; nowadays, it's an end to mass migration and bad trade deals.

Does this make populism problematic?

Politicians like Mike Pence use the “populism” charge to dismiss the very real concerns of American citizens today. Unchecked immigration, foreign military intervention, the loss of American industry — these are all very real issues that impact *all* Americans. The few beneficiaries of such destructive policies are the globalist elites who have zero allegiance to America.

In view of that situation — a situation that has been the case for well over a century — populism does serve as a useful model that can help people better understand the way in which global oligarchs have obtained undue power over political affairs.

Yet there remains a danger, as any ideology is dangerous when it goes beyond being a useful heuristic and becomes a mold into which thinkers try to force reality. The danger is that the notion of the “people vs. the elite” can and is abused to fit into the Marxist worldview of poor vs. rich, black vs. white, gay vs. straight, woman vs. man, etc. And this is the cause of a great deal of demagoguery.

In conclusion, while the dismissive “populism” charges by Establishment politicians today is often a sign of their allegiance to the agenda of the globalist cartel, there is nevertheless a legitimate need to temper populist tendencies within political movements and rhetoric. The ascension of powerful men, such as Julius Caesar, through history shows what happens to a republic when such restraints aren't put in place — it gives way to tyranny.

It should be noted that the men who founded America had similar concerns about the fate of their fledgling republic. Founding Fathers like Washington, Jefferson, and Adams were aristocrats who created governmental controls with the specific aim of restricting the will of the people in order to protect rights and preserve social order.

As is typically the case, greater education of the public is needed. The people must be more strongly instructed in history and the Constitution, as well as in the methods of fighting tyranny, to be able to properly combat America's globalist enemies without falling into the excesses of demagoguery.



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