

**Dueling Populisms: How Governing and Opposition Parties Exploit Populist Discourses, Close the Market, and Trap Serbia in a Hybrid Regime**

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**Abstract:**

Populism, along with its perplexing relationship with democracy, has been one of the major objects of scholarly interest in recent years. This work in progress was inspired by Milada Vachudova's (2020) question: how do opposition parties respond to incumbent's populism? It was already argued that populism could be a useful corrective for a polity (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012). Therefore, in a context of a country with a symptom of a democratic backslide, if opposition parties respond with an arsenal of populist tools, can it be a useful corrective for a polity? Should a political movement that opposes the rulers and seeks to input additional preferences of a part of a political community which are neglected or suppressed by the government be welcomed? Simply, an opposition to populist, democracy-degrading regime should be good.

This work examines the case when populist styles are utilized by both governing and opposition parties in an environment where democracy backslides and when both signal values inimical to flourishing of democracy. Typical elements of populist styles are identified in both Serbia's Vučić regime, and its opposition, which boycotted institutions. These include antiestablishmentarianism, simplified good/bad worldview, fear of dangerous entities, aggressive confrontational style, and opposition to democratic rules. Both governing and opposition parties are entrenched in their self-righteous worldviews and signal reservations to the Europeanization process.

The point this work attempts to make is that if populism has a propensity to do good, if it is to be a corrective for a regime, it needs to promote democratic values on its own or the values that foster democratization. Otherwise, a country could be trapped in a hybrid regime equilibrium, which is exemplified in Serbia.