

Populism as a Society Dividing Discourse in Lithuania: The Case of the Elections of Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania of 2024

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Abstract : This study analyses the rise of global populism in Western democracies, focusing primarily on the populist rhetoric. Populist rhetoric is based on anti-pluralist ideas, opposing a “homogeneous nation” against “dangerous others” who are pushed out of the nation by populists, and can be citizens from both in-groups and out-groups. This study will examine the case of the elections of Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania of 2024. Fifteen candidate lists of parties and coalitions participated in the elections to the Lithuanian Parliament in 2024. Focus group methodology will be used to analyse the narratives of party supporters actively engaged in politics, trying to identify public support/opposition to populism. Liberal democracy is experiencing a crisis in both the US and Western democracies in Europe. The election results of recent years are increasingly announcing populist victories or the creation of new populist parties. Far-right parties lead the governments in three countries – Hungary, Slovakia, and Italy, and they are part of the ruling coalition in Sweden, Finland, and the Netherlands. It will become clear in the USA whether Donald Trump will be re-elected as president in November of this year. Trump’s victory in 2016 was named by political scientists as the apotheosis of populism. Influential politicians consolidate all bad manners and social categorization in the digital era of demagoguery. The research shows that a significant proportion of democratic societies also support this divisive discourse. Citizens, as consumers of information, often approve of populist communication themselves. New parliament elections were held in Lithuania in October 2024. Ideas that polarize society were amplified in the public space, negativism increased, and with it distrust towards the state, its institutions, and democratically elected politicians, “enemies” were sought and conspiracy theories were created. Problem of the Study. This study analyses the global rise of populism from the perspective of Lithuania with various groups of society, trying to understand the relationship of citizens with democracy through believing in populists, approval/disapproval of the expression of populism. Opinions are an important challenge when trying to find the truth in the age of populism, because democratic societies are based on the culture of discussion and the idea of consensus. Methodology. This study will deconstruct the narratives of Lithuanian citizens from the point of view of populism. Fifteen focus group discussions will be held with supporters of the party lists that participated in the Parliament elections of the Republic of Lithuania during November-December 2024. The main unifying criterion for focus group participants is their political activity, while the distinguishing criteria are age, gender and place of residence. Fifteen focus groups were chosen due to the fact that fifteen candidate lists of parties and coalitions participated in the elections and seeking to ensure the variety of participants. This study aims to emphasize populism as a communication phenomenon in Lithuania. Public testimonies and experiences will reveal new meanings about the understanding of populism and support/opposition towards it.

Keywords : democracy, narratives in populist rhetoric, populist rhetoric, populism

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