

## Populism and Human Rights in a Turbulent Era

Alison Brysk, *Populism and Human Rights in a Turbulent Era*; (Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, U.K: 2023) Pg 206

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A hallmark of populist leaders is their claim to be the true ‘voice of the people,’ but what if the ‘voice of the people’ threatens their fundamental rights. As populist rhetoric echoes worldwide, this book delves into how populism is reshaping the landscape of human rights. The book includes contributions from a range of scholars. The editor of the book is Alison Brysk, an American political scientist and professor, known for her work on human rights, global governance, and social movements.

The book explores the rise of populism and erosion of human rights in a variety of national contexts and sheds light on its diverse manifestations. In Central and Eastern Europe, exclusionary conservative populism has deep roots in the region's history of ethnic tensions, foreign domination and gaps in the nation-building process. Populist leaders channeled the people’s resentment to promote nationalist and anti-liberal agendas, leading to democratic backsliding and discrimination against minorities.

Turning to Mexico, left-wing populism of the Mexican President Andrés Obrador delegitimised the concerns of feminist, indigenous,

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and labour rights groups by framing their opposition as betrayal. Furthermore, the populist rhetoric of the Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte was built on anti-elite and anti-crime narratives. His term was marked by institutional weakening, media manipulation and harsh drug crackdowns.

In Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro's right-wing populism relied on anti-gender narratives. His term was marked by a rollback on human rights, political repression, censorship and undermining of democratic institutions. In the case of India, religiously driven populism has led to the centralisation of power, politicisation of institutions and political repression. In the US, an analysis of 'Trumpism' reveals a form of reactionary populism which promotes myths of racial, cultural and religious decline. In practice, it assaults rights in health, education, and law.

A key strength of this book lies in its in-depth, country-specific analysis. Populism is not treated as a monolithic and uniform phenomenon. The contributors highlight how its manifestations and effects differ across diverse national landscapes. Each chapter delves into the distinct political, cultural and historical context of a particular state, shedding light on the factors contributing to the rise and appeal of populism in that context.

This helps the reader to better understand the distinct dimensions and aspects of populism. In addition, the book skillfully draws insightful parallels between cases and uncovers common patterns. This enables a better grasp of populism's core characteristics. Hence, the analysis is balanced, combining the key features of populism along with compelling portraits of how it plays out in different national contexts.

The book's composition is another appealing aspect as the content is enriched by a diversity of perspectives and expert analysis on different areas and regions. Moreover, due to strong editorial foresight and a unified vision among authors, the book maintains coherence and synergy. In addition, the book effectively explores the ideological spectrum within populism. Rather than restricting the analysis to a single political orientation, the book explores both left-wing and right wing forms.

To protect human rights from the threats posed by populist movements, the book proposes a multidimensional strategy which involves ensuring effective governance, forging broad and inclusive social alliances, and promoting pluralistic and humanising narratives. However, the book lacks a deeper exploration of countermeasures.

A dedicated chapter would have provided policymakers with valuable insights to tackle the challenges posed by populism. Moreover, the book would have gained from showcasing the efforts of individuals and groups striving to combat populist narratives.

Another aspect that would have made the book more compelling is the inclusion of statements and speeches made by populist leaders. It is crucial to look at the language and framing techniques used by populist leaders to better understand the functioning of populism and its impact on the people.

Overall, the book presents a thoughtful analysis of the key motivations behind populism and factors contributing to its appeal across diverse groups. The methods and strategies have also been explored used to push agendas and sustain public support. Consequences of populist narratives on human rights have been effectively identified.■