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Populism and the persistence of Latin America's  
underperformance

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Abstract:

Populism helps explain democratic and economic underperformance in the region. Far from weakening, populism may be getting stronger. It is currently being boosted by the rise of far-right populism in the United States (and Europe), which was unusual until now. I draw on theories of International Relations to discuss how the Trump administration is boosting populism in the region. Next, I review how a reinvigorated populism will likely continue hurting democracy – it radicalises the state, renders actors less tolerant of pluralism, and opens new avenues of polarisation by reinforcing cultural wars. I then discuss populism and economic development. Although it is conventional to explain populism by invoking economic underperformance, I suggest that, in the region, the causal arrow *also* goes the other way. Populism yields economic underperformance, which in turn fuels populism. In short, the region seems to be caught in a “populism trap”. *Keywords:* Populism trap, emulation, bandwagoning, polarisation, human capital, tax structures.

Resumen: El populismo y la persistencia del bajo rendimiento de América Latina

El populismo ayuda a explicar el bajo rendimiento democrático y económico de la región. Lejos de debilitarse, el populismo puede estar fortaleciéndose. Actualmente se ve impulsado por el auge del populismo de extrema derecha en Estados Unidos (y Europa), algo inusual hasta ahora. Me baso en teorías de Relaciones Internacionales para analizar cómo la administración Trump está impulsando el populismo en la región. Seguidamente analizo cómo es probable que un populismo revitalizado siga perjudicando la democracia: radicaliza al Estado, hace que los actores sean menos tolerantes con el pluralismo y abre nuevas vías de polarización al reforzar las guerras culturales. Luego analizo el populismo y el desarrollo económico. Aunque lo habitual es explicar el populismo invocando los malos resultados económicos, sugiero que en la región la relación causal también funciona en sentido contrario. El populismo

genera malos resultados económicos, lo que a su vez alimenta el populismo. En resumen, la región parece estar atrapada en una “trampa populista”. *Palabras clave:* Trampa del populismo, emulación, efecto *bandwagon*, polarización, capital humano, estructuras fiscales.

## **Introduction**

Latin America has yet to escape its attachment to populism. During the first two decades of the twenty-first century, Latin American politics were consumed by the rise of far-left populism. It was the era dominated by boisterous Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, and Rafael Correa, with many other presidents taking cues from them. As we enter the second quarter of the twenty-first century, the region seems to be veering toward far-right populism, with equally boisterous presidents such as Jair Bolsonaro, Javier Milei, and Nayib Bukele attracting attention.

Populism in Latin America is not moving away; it is moving pendularly. This essay argues that the persistence of populism in the region continues to undermine the region’s democratic performance and development potential. The article then discusses how the United States, through global transmission mechanisms, is currently fueling a new wave of populism in the region. I then argue that the recurrence of populism in the region, whether left- or right-wing, plays a major role in the persistence of democratic and economic underperformance. The region may find itself in its own version of a “populism trap”. The recurrence of populism, now boosted by the United States, lowers democratic and economic performance, which in turn boosts the demand for more populism.

## **The United States and the swelling of right-wing populism in the Americas**

Populism has been salient in Latin America since the 1930s, long before it became mainstream in advanced-economy democracies (Dornbusch & Edwards, 1991; Schularick, Trebesch & Funke, 2021). It has also been extensively studied.<sup>1</sup> Yet, one aspect of populism that has received less attention is that it always borrows from abroad. Latin American populists rarely copy foreign models wholesale, but they often draw inspiration from foreign movements. Getúlio Vargas in Brazil and Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina, for instance, borrowed from Italian Fascism and Iberian hyper-nationalism; Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico, on the other hand, drew inspiration from Soviet-style Socialism. In the twenty-first century, Hugo Chávez drew inspiration (and technical advice) from Cuban Revolutionary thought, and Javier Milei in Argentina drew inspiration from Margaret Thatcher’s economic liberalism and Elon Musk’s techno-libertarianism.

What is novel about populism in Latin America today, and especially with right-wing populism, is not that it is taking cues from abroad, but that it is taking cues from the very same country that has traditionally been the most economically influential in the region: the United States. This represents a change. In the past, if anything, the United States tended to play a role in restraining populism,

at least, curbing its excesses. Under the second Trump administration, by contrast, Washington is acting as a galvanising force on behalf of populism abroad, providing encouragement to like-minded populists.

It is worth expanding on how U.S. far-right populism, now in office, seeks to influence the world. The MAGA movement has returned to office with a clear foreign policy. This foreign policy is intended to disseminate populism. The policy includes the following precepts:

- 1) *Sectarianism*: overt favouritism toward political movements that are closely aligned ideologically.<sup>2</sup>
- 2) *Unilateralism*: repudiation of multilateral institutions.<sup>3</sup>
- 3) *Hyper-nationalism*: hostility to most forms of imports, tangible and otherwise.<sup>4</sup>
- 4) *Punitivism*: eagerness to impose costs on governments that refuse to cooperate.<sup>5</sup>
- 5) *Democracy demotion*: relegating democracy and human rights to an even lower priority than at any point since the 1970s.<sup>6</sup>

These precepts were present during the first Trump administration, and to some degree, previous administrations. But under the second Trump administration, they have returned with an unprecedented vengeance. By vengeance, I mean that these ideas are coming to the White House in extreme and radicalised form. Furthermore, a much larger team of advisers committed to these precepts have joined the White House to aid in this effort than was the case during the first Trump administration. In addition, the Trump administration has emerged at a time when far-right populist parties are also on the rise in Europe, creating new forms of international allies that help amplify Trump's influence abroad.

Some scholars will argue that MAGA's foreign policy is a mere remake of long-standing U.S. imperialism. However, it is important to recognise that it still represents, in some ways, a *new* form of imperialism. It is new in that it draws from, but also diverges from, earlier far-right foreign policy episodes of imperialism. For instance, like the Monroe Doctrine,<sup>7</sup> "MAGA-ism" is fearful of foreign interference in the hemisphere. However, unlike the Monroe Doctrine, it is far less respectful of national self-determination. Like the Roosevelt Corollary, it normalises the use of force in foreign policy, even invasions.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, unlike the Corollary, MAGA-ism has little interest in questions of good governance or domestic stability. Like hardline Cold War doctrines, MAGA-ism looks at Latin America mostly in terms of threats (to the United States), but the "new" threats it focuses on (trade with China, organised crime, migration flows) are more nebulous and less easily tackled through traditional security tools than Cold War threats (Soviet expansionism; guerrilla warfare). Moreover, unlike Cold War foreign policy, MAGA-ism comes with minimal concern for development aid as a friend-making tool.

In short, MAGA's foreign policy may have antecedents, but it also contains new elements. These elements are designed to turbo-charge like-minded populist

movements. But in the process, they may also turbo-charge opposite-minded populists.

### **Impact on democracy: More populism**

The rise of far-right populism in the United States has implications for the quality of democracy in Latin America. It will deepen populism of both the left and the right. It will do so through at least three mechanisms of influence.

*Emulation.* Far-right movements in the region are feeling legitimised by the example of the United States. Emulation and radicalization may follow. We have seen some of this under Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil (during the first Trump administration), Javier Milei in Argentina (shortly after Trump's return), and more recently in José Antonio Kast's movement in Chile. These far-right politicians supplemented their own branch of right-wing populism with elements of Trump-style far-right populism. For instance, in the case of "tough-on-crime" neo-Evangelical Bolsonaro, there was emulation of anti-science politics during the pandemic and, of course, Trump's January 6, 2021, self-coup. In the case of libertarian Milei, there has been an embrace of anti-wokism, elements that were never salient parts of Milei's campaign. In the case of Kast, there has been an escalation of references to threats posed by crime and migrants and an increase in "trash-talking" of both the left and even the centre.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, these leaders now sell themselves at home as the most effective appeasers of Trump's foreign policy excesses. They argue that the best way to contain Trump's excesses is to elect an ideological friend of Trump: convergence is needed to moderate Trump's punitivism.

*Bandwagoning.* Smaller states may instead align with U.S. preferences in exchange for protection. In international relations theory, this is often referred to as bandwagoning.<sup>10</sup> In theory, countries pursue bandwagoning with the intention of securing defense against external threats. However, in the Trump era, bandwagoning is aimed at buying protection from U.S. criticism. All it might take to achieve this is for leaders to offer Trump lavish praise, gifts, and, of course, full granting of wishes. For instance, Nayib Bukele essentially turned El Salvador into a penal colony of the United States by agreeing to house deportees. Not only did he receive huge side payments, but more importantly, full praise from the United States (i.e., no criticism for human rights abuses). From the left, we also saw bandwagoning from Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico. When Trump threatened to impose escalating tariffs on Mexican exports unless migration was curbed in 2019, AMLO agreed to deploy over 25,000 National Guard troops to Mexico's southern and northern borders. His government accepted the controversial "Migrant Protection Protocols," requiring asylum seekers to wait in Mexico while their U.S. cases were processed. These concessions garnered AMLO complete silence from the first Trump administration on any of AMLO's democratic infractions (Meyer, 2019; Seelke, 2023). AMLO's successor, Claudia Sheinbaum, is also maintaining many of the cooperative mechanisms with

the U.S. on drug trafficking, border security, and cartel enforcement that were part of AMLO's policy toward the United States, especially when facing U.S. pressure (tariffs, designations, etc.).

*Re-legitimation and radicalization of the anti-imperialist left.* Another effect, more typical of far-left populist governments, is to respond to rising populism in the United States with heightened anti-U.S. rhetoric and policies. This response is often described as “soft balancing” in international relations theory (Pape, 2005). Because most countries lack the capacity to challenge the U.S. militarily (hard balancing), those interested in containing the United States rely instead on rhetoric, electoral mobilisation of anti-American sentiment, and diversification of foreign policy ties. The problem is that this form of soft-balancing could be a way to camouflage pre-existing anti-democratic populist impulses, i.e., to disguise with “progressive” ideology pre-existing intentions to turn or stay illiberal and anti-pluralistic. A process of forgiveness may take place domestically. Citizens may end up accepting poor government performance (Colombia under Gustavo Petro) or authoritarian moves (Mexico under López Obrador) simply because they admire their government's anti-Trump rhetorical stands.<sup>11</sup> In other cases, leftist governments may take advantage of their confrontation with Trump to turn more authoritarian. When Trump deployed U.S. warships to the north of Venezuela in the summer of 2025, leftist dictator Nicolás Maduro called for the recruitment of up to 4.5 million militias and ordered the deployment of 15,000 troops. There is a long history among Latin American leftist authoritarians that when the going gets tough, the tough get tougher: when faced with external threats, hard-liners in government become even harder-line and more entrenched. This raises the classic cause-versus-excuse debate: is imperialism a cause of left-wing authoritarian turns, or do these leftist-authoritarian governments merely use anti-imperialism as a pretext to justify authoritarianism? Either way, MAGA-ism has the potential to deepen autocracy in the region by giving justification to hardline policies within those regimes.

There is, of course, the counter-argument – that MAGA-ism will weaken left-wing populism. If the external threat gets extra-tough, might anti-imperialist, authoritarian-populist governments finally collapse under the new pressure? No doubt, the chance always exists for frontal attacks by the United States to yield regime change. But the track record in Latin America so far is typically the opposite. Except for Nicaragua in the late 1980s, most left-wing populists have survived strong U.S. pressure, including harsh sanctions. Sanctions tend not to yield regime change. They might prompt changes in policy (rather than regime), but only when the target country is economically dependent on the United States. In autocracies, especially anti-U.S. ones, hard sanctions can entrench the government's hard-liners just as easily as they can weaken opponents in civil society (Sabatini & Isard, 2025). A government's chances of surviving hard sanctions increase if great powers are available to provide economic, military, and technical support, as Russia, China, Turkey, Iran, and others have done with Venezuela and Cuba.

In short, the interplay between U.S. far-right populism and Latin America risks reinforcing authoritarian and populist tendencies on both the left and the right. The United States has now created more opportunities for populist leaders to come to power and to govern in illiberal ways. This is true of both far-right populists, who engage in emulation, radicalisation, and bandwagoning, as well as left-wing populists, who can capitalise on anti-imperialist sentiment to justify their actions.

### **Impact on polarisation: Opening a new war front**

Most populisms, whether left or right, share a common template: they heighten polarisation (Carrión, 2022; Selçuk, 2024). To justify significant concentration of power and declines in pluralism, all invoke some maximalist policy goal (distributionism from the left, fighting crime and wokism from the right), together with the existence of some agent threatening the nation or the community at large. Attacks on dissent are sold as the best way to defend “the people” against harming “elites”. Rules are changed to favour the ruling party and disfavour opponents. The result is more polarisation.

That said, each variety of populisms emphasises some issues more than others. In the case of far-right populism in the Americas, one of its distinctive emphases is often social conservatism. This involves pushing back on issues of women’s rights, sexuality, and even separation of church and state (de la Torre, 2025). Socio-conservatism has always been a part of populism. But in its latest incarnation, far-right populism in Latin America is elevating socio-conservatism to new levels of priority, often eclipsing other policy goals such as economic liberalisation. By elevating socio-conservatism to a higher priority, the current strands of far-right populists are creating or exacerbating a new domain of polarization. They are challenging the idea that democracy should attenuate the patriarchy. They question the legal rights that women and LGBT individuals have acquired. This new cultural attack represents a new type of threat to an important aspect of liberal and participatory democracy in the region – the drive for inclusion of groups that were traditional victims of the patriarchy and heteronormativity.

If there was one area of democracy where Latin America did not underachieve in the last twenty years, it has been on issues of women’s rights and LGBT rights. Starting in the 2000s, most countries in the region introduced far-reaching legal rights and bureaucratic practices to safeguard political spaces for victims of the patriarchy and heteronormativity. Populists seized multiple opportunities to mobilise resentment among groups that felt disempowered by, or ideologically opposed to, the erosion of patriarchal and heteronormative privileges. These groups include anti-feminists, homo- and transphobic people, conservative faith communities, highly religious voters, etc. This has meant that the region is now characterised by an abundance of “homophobic populism” and “populist homophobia”. (Corrales & Kiryk, 2022; Corrales, forthcoming).

Homophobic populism occurs when populist leaders approach religious leaders and faith communities with the following proposal: I will support your socio-conservative demands (slow down on gender and sexuality rights) if you tolerate my illiberal policies (declines in pluralism, concentration of power, abuses of authority, and even corruption). Populist homophobia, by contrast, refers to the discourse strategy of conservative religious leaders to make their anti-feminist and homo- and transphobic stands more appealing to non-religious groups. Central to this strategy is “victim inversion”: portraying marginalised sexual and gender minorities as harmful agents of the majority. They argue that feminists and pro-LGBT advocates are seeking to impose on the rest of the citizens a harmful ideology, which they call the “ideology of gender.” They argue that majorities have a democratic right to reject this ideology if they so choose, just as any citizen in any democracy is free to reject any ideology.

The encouraging news is that resistance to both homophobic populism and populist homophobia has been significant in Latin America. The effectiveness of this resistance depends partly on demographics: where irreligious populations exceed roughly 15 per cent of the electorate and are sizable enough relative to evangelicals and conservative Catholics, pushback is stronger against homophobic populism. The unfortunate news is that a new battleground has been introduced in the region that centres around cultural issues.

The key point is that, while homophobic populism has surged in the region and is likely to continue to make inroads with the growth of far-right populism, it is not achieving hegemonic dominance in most countries. As with all forms of populism, homophobic populism produces enough allergic reactions across large sectors of the population, mostly irreligious groups and liberal and moderately practising Catholics. Polls reveal that these sectors of the population are growing in most Latin American countries, even if Evangelicals and conservative Christians are growing as well. That said, the problem remains: the introduction of this new form of cultural polarisation in the region generates new tensions, empowers anti-pluralist groups, and distracts from other priorities, one of which is economic underperformance.

### **Development errors and omissions**

I turn my attention now to the impact of populism on economic development. Economic development is, without a doubt, an area where Latin America and the Caribbean have underperformed. This underperformance is intimately related to the recurrence of populist governments. Many scholars often treat the region's economic underperformance as an explanation for populism: underperformance creates too many have-nots, which gives rise to anti-status quo sentiment, which in turn feeds the demand for populist politicians (e.g., Levitsky & Loxton, 2018). I do not seek to dispute such an argument. I simply want to discuss the possibility that the causal arrow can also go the other way: the recurrence of populism in office can cause economic underperformance. The result is

what one could describe as a “populist vicious cycle” or “populism trap”. Populism leads to economic underperformance, which in turn leads to greater demand for more populist politicians, and in turn, more economic underperformance.

First, a word on the region’s economic underperformance. Since the mid-2010s, Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced the lowest economic growth among emerging regions, with the region’s growth pace lagging behind its peers and projected to remain the slowest through 2027. Especially worrisome are investment trends. The World Bank found that investment growth in Latin America and the Caribbean slowed between 2011 and 2021, marking one of the sharpest slowdowns among comparable regions since the 2000s. In addition, the investment was “volatile,” buffeted by commodity price swings and financial cycles (Kasyanenko et al., 2025). In many ways, the region serves as a textbook case of the middle-income trap, growing at a slower pace than both low- and high-income societies (World Bank, 2024). More broadly, one could argue that the region fails miserably in meeting the standards of “inclusive economic institutions” set forth by Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) in their path-breaking book *Why Nations Fail*. These authors define inclusive economic institutions as a system of economic governance that guarantees: 1) secure property rights; 2) an unbiased system of law; 3) provision of public services; 4) a level playing field in which people can exchange and contract, and 5) ease of business entry. The populism of either the left or the right makes it impossible to obtain these guarantees, and often directly conspires against them.

When the left governs responsibly in the region, its best contribution to economic development has been reducing poverty and inequality without jeopardising macroeconomic stability (Levitsky & Roberts, 2011; Flores-Macías, 2012). When the right governs responsibly, its main achievement has been restoring order (in contexts of insecurity) and fiscal discipline (in contexts of deficits), while safeguarding open economic rules and property rights (Luna & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2014; Shifter, 2011). However, when populism takes hold, whether from the far left or the far right, development suffers. Governments pursue their main developmental policy goals (poverty alleviation on the left, protection of property rights on the right), while simultaneously expanding Executive arbitrariness. Inclusive economic institutions become elusive.

On the left, this dynamic of economic governance with state discretionality was clear in Chávez/Maduro’s Venezuela, Ortega/Murillo’s Nicaragua, Morales’ Bolivia, and Correa’s Ecuador. Social spending expanded, but it was directed disproportionately and arbitrarily to pro-government groups. State expenditures were allocated with few controls, if any. Experts were dismissed from public service solely for political misalignment with the governing party. Contracts between the state and foreign and domestic actors received minimal public scrutiny. These law-defying practices ultimately proved self-defeating. Private investments were too dependent on state favours, rather than on the rise of institutions that could secure property rights. Consequently, once resource windfalls stopped around the mid-2010s, economic performance crashed.

Far-right populists make similar errors – they too expand discretionality. Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil frequently intervened in state-owned enterprises (notably, Petrobras) to influence pricing policy. He offered tax incentives to private actors in a discretionary fashion. He was accused of using “secret budgets” to channel funds to lawmakers. He expanded public spending during his last year in office to boost his electoral chances. He issued decrees permitting government agencies to withhold important information and economic data. Likewise, in an effort to establish order and reduce crime and thus attract foreign investment, Nayib Bukele in El Salvador has also undertaken arbitrary mass arrests in complete disregard of due process. Since 2022, El Salvador has been under a state of emergency, leading to more than 80,000 arrests – equivalent to roughly 4 per cent of the country's male population (Human Rights Watch, 2023). To expand supposedly the “rule of law”, Bukele paradoxically expanded lawlessness (Meléndez-Sánchez & Vergara, 2024). None of these gains in security has translated into economic gains: 30 per cent of Salvadorans are still living in poverty (Magaloni & Diaz-Cayeros 2025). In addition, one of Bukele's most emblematic economic programs – the use of bitcoin as a reserve asset – is notoriously non-transparent, with the government releasing very few credible audits.

Similar patterns of legal disarray and power concentration are visible in Argentina under Javier Milei. His campaign to eradicate inflation – a noble goal, symbolized in his “chainsaw” campaign rallies – has entailed a striking degree of presidential arbitrariness. Early in his presidency (December 2023), Milei issued a sweeping *Decreto de Necesidad y Urgencia* (*Necessity and Emergency decree*), comprising 366 articles, which unilaterally revoked or modified numerous existing laws. This decree bypassed Congress, dissolved multiple government agencies, and resulted in the dismissal of approximately 36,000 civil servants. When his 2025 budget proposal failed to pass, Milei extended the 2024 budget by decree, leaving Argentina without a legislated budget for two years.

At their best, far-left and far-right populisms have demonstrated that they can achieve some important, albeit narrow, economic goals. The far left, for instance, can succeed in reducing poverty and inequality; the far right, in reducing crime and inflation. These are vital triumphs. But they are insufficient to secure inclusive economic institutions.

Worse, even when they succeed in obtaining narrow objectives, both far-left and far-right populisms often make critical omissions, not just errors. For instance, despite its concern with social justice, far-left populism typically neglects education. This is unfortunate because the region suffers from a severe “learning crisis”. Except for Chile and Uruguay, most Latin American countries lag behind academically at almost every level. Students consistently underperform on international assessments compared to their peers in other regions with similar income levels (World Bank, 2022). In some countries, between 20 and 60 per cent of primary school teachers lack formal credentials. Education infrastructure is decrepit. Reducing poverty without improving other aspects of human capital

formation, such as education outcomes, falls short as a reliable solution to the middle-income trap.

Likewise, despite its emphasis on guaranteeing property rights, far-right populism (except in Argentina) has lost interest in fiscal discipline, which was so central to far-right populists in the 1990s. This change in economic preferences is unfortunate because it has made far-right populists even less interested than ever in addressing the region's dysfunctional tax structures. Latin American states collect relatively low levels of taxation compared to OECD averages: around 22 per cent of GDP versus 34 per cent in the OECD (OECD, 2022). Tax systems rely heavily on regressive indirect taxes (such as VAT), while progressive taxes on income, wealth, and property remain underdeveloped. This tax structure results in chronically underfunded states (Mahon 2023). Inequality exacerbates this problem: where income is highly concentrated, the tax base is structurally small, and elites can more easily evade taxation (Lustig, 2018). To worry about strengthening property rights while neglecting the tax structure, and thus, state capacity, is a significant oversight. Markets cannot efficiently function if states are underdelivering (Kingstone, 2018). Moreover, when the far-right worsens inequality, they worsen the state crisis because they worsen the tax crisis. With underfunded states, regardless of the strength of property rights, it is hard to imagine states ever being able to fulfil basic tasks needed to escape the middle-income trap, such as ushering in technological upgrading, economic complexity, corporate innovation, and export diversification.

In short, both far-left and far-right populisms make significant errors (excessive state arbitrariness) and omissions (investments in human capital or state-building). The arbitrariness makes it impossible to achieve inclusive economic institutions; the omissions make it impossible to escape the middle-income trap.

## **Conclusion**

Latin America remains the land of populism. Now that (far-right) populism has also become dominant in the United States, the nation with the most significant influence in the region, Latin America's proclivity toward populism is likely to deepen. This is worrisome because Latin America's democratic and economic underperformance cannot be separated from its penchant for populism. When populism dominates, whether under the left-wing banner of redistribution or the right-wing banner of law and order, inclusion comes with new forms of aggressive exclusion, public institutions lose their independence, economic policy becomes too discretionary, expertise is sidelined, and rules become too volatile. The chances of generating "inclusive economic institutions" decline. The result is short-term gains when one is lucky, and medium-term fragility almost inevitably. Worse still, both left- and right-wing populisms systematically neglect the structural reforms that are indispensable for escaping the middle-income trap – strengthening education systems and building fair and robust tax regimes. When they focus on ideological campaigns, including declines in pluralism, they also

introduce new areas of polarisation. These new cultural war episodes detract attention from development priorities.

In sum, the region faces a deficit of democratic and economic institutions, a serious middle-income trap, and, as I have argued, a “populism trap”. Populist governments perpetuate the region’s democratic and economic underperformance. This underperformance generates voter demand for more populism, which in turn perpetuates the region’s underperformance. And now the United States is boosting the supply of populism. Until the supply side of populism ends, the region’s chances of addressing its democratic deficits and escaping its middle-income trap will remain in question.

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## Notes

- 1 In discussing populism, I will follow the standard definition of populism as a movement that divides the electorates into two camps (the people versus some privilege minority, often called elites), believes that the former are all victims and the latter are harming agents, and claims that the way to deepen democracy is to give full power to the people (and thus its leaders) and impose restrictions or punishment on harming agents (Müller, 2016).
- 2 <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/trump-brazil-tariff-show-of-solidarity-with-populist-politician-bolsonaro-by-jan-werner-mueller-2025-07>
- 3 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/age-american-unilateralism>
- 4 <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/international-community-must-unite-against-american-protectionism-by-anne-o-krueger-2025-04>
- 5 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/trumps-collision-course-brazil>
- 6 The Trump administration has ordered the State Department to omit important sections on human rights from the annual reports it produces for every country in the world, leading to reports that will be potentially half in length. <https://freedomhouse.org/article/assessing-damage-changes-us-state-departments-human-rights-reports>. See also <https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/07/24/liberal-international-order-dismantling-trump-usaid-state-department-human-rights/>
- 7 The Monroe Doctrine is a U.S. foreign policy framework established in 1823 by President James Monroe, warning European powers against further intervention in the Western Hemisphere.

- 8 The Roosevelt Corollary was an extension in 1904 of the Monroe Doctrine, with President Theodore Roosevelt's asserting the United States' right to act as an "international police power" in the Western Hemisphere to correct "wrongdoing or impotence" by Latin American nations.
- 9 For trash-talking and populism, see Cella et al. (2025). [https://elpais.com/chile/2025-08-19/jose-antonio-kast-sobre-jeannette-jara-nos-ofrece-enfrentar-a-los-delincuentes-con-amor.html?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://elpais.com/chile/2025-08-19/jose-antonio-kast-sobre-jeannette-jara-nos-ofrece-enfrentar-a-los-delincuentes-con-amor.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com).
- 10 On bandwagoning and International Relations, see Walt (1987)
- 11 In Colombia, governance problems include President Gustavo Petro's laxity about issues of corruption within his administration, disregard for rising drug production, and repeated threats to bypass Congress. In Mexico, authoritarian moves consist of President Claudia Sheinbaum's introduction of one of the most significant erosions of judicial independence (by approving a reform to appoint all judges through elections), continuing the process started by her predecessor, AMLO, aimed at achieving ruling party control of all branches of government.

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