



Title: Populism: representation or polarization?

Acronym: PREOPOL

Project leader: Nina Wiesehomeier

Host organisation: School of Global and Public Affairs, IE University

Main purpose of the project:

Is populism a threat or a corrective to democracy? Recent electoral successes have propelled populist parties into national parliaments across the world. PREOPOL analyzes this populist representation in the Spanish legislature to unpack the impact of populist ideas on debate quality, descriptive and substantive representation, and social polarization.

Design/methodology/approach:

The multidimensional nature of representations calls for a multifaceted approach. PREOPOL combines quantitative and qualitative text analysis of debates and law proposals with public opinion data, survey experiments, and focus groups to convey a holistic account of populist representation and its effects.

Potential results:

PREOPOL will provide a contextualized account of the impact of populism. The project will showcase whether populist parties improve representation of previously neglected groups, providing an answer to the crisis of democratic representation, or whether they rather deepen this crisis by deepening societal divisions.

Social relevance of the research:

PREOPOL will trace the effect of populism within, but also beyond existing democratic institutions, which may help to anticipate populism's effect on institutions and the broader society. Evaluating how citizens react to the exposure to populist representation and messaging, it will develop and test mitigation strategies based on communication.

Originality/value of the project:

PREOPOL moves beyond a narrow focus of populist actors in government and understands populist representation as embedded in institutions. It ties together different dimensions of parliamentary representation, combining literatures on populism and unequal representation that have so far operated in isolation.