
Political entropy – the problem of social inequality and the rising global wave of populism

‘I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.’

Nelson Mandela,
Rivonia Trial in South Africa, 1964.

Introduction

The world is currently struggling with different crises – global food crisis, climate crisis, poorness/poverty crisis, and democracy crisis. It is evident that the reality shaped during the Cold War is changing into an unknown one. In the 20th century, international relations were ruled by two world superpowers – the United States of America and the Soviet Union. A bipolar world system was appropriate for international relations because the two sides wanted to improve their damage and defence abilities in order to surpass their opponent.

Kenneth N. Waltz, the American scientist and representative of American realism, admitted in his 1964 article ‘The Stability of a Bipolar World’, that:

‘In a bipolar world, on the other hand, attention is focused on crises by both of the major competitors, and especially by the defensive state. (...) One’s motto may still be, “push to the limit”, but limit must be emphasized as heavily as push.

Caution, moderation, and the management of crisis come to be of great and obvious importance' (Waltz, 1964, p. 884).

During the Cold War era, world crises created by one superpower would be defeated by the opposite side. The Soviet Union cared about countries under communism and socialism, while the United States of America and its allies also cared about their ideological partners around the world. It was much easier to create a predictable, stable international system and affirm it. At the end of 20th century and the beginning of 21st century, when only one superpower remained, the situation changed into something like entropy. As we can see, a new multipolar world has begun that we can call a new political system: political entropy.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, entropy is a complete lack of order (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary). We can observe it in the modern political system, where we notice plenty of aspiring old and new regional powers and politicians who have their own perspective of justice, rule the country, and solve problems. We could easily define it as political entropy. In this article, I analyse the connection between social inequality and the rising wave of populism around the world from the international relations point of view.

1. Populism and social inequality – definitions

Populism in theory is the thing or idea that appeals to the majority of a group or society. Populist leaders do not look for real political long-term priorities that can improve the economic, social, or military sphere of their nation or state. They rather turn into concepts of nationhood and national identity to gain more in a short period of time. Their way of making policy is based on propaganda. Usually, populists are against values such as: cooperation, liberal values, and even migration processes (Lilleker, 2006, pp. 160–162). The beginning of populist policy harks back to the 20th century – when Hitler, Mussolini, Lenin, and Stalin ruled Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union. In 1933, Adolf Hitler became the new Chancellor of German Reich. One of the most important things for Hitler was appearance – looking good during speeches, in propaganda films, and materials. Benito Mussolini also wanted to base his popularity on extremely emotional speeches and performances (two most important things in a populist way of policy) (Koepnick et al., 2004, pp. 47–54).

Hitler gained power because of his impressive promises to normal people, f. ex. the unemployed, farmers, people suffering from hunger and economic crises after Germany lost the First World War. Hitler also said that the new administration would not recognise classes, they would recognise 'German people' with whom all together they would overcome the period of distress (Gallately, 2007, pp. 285-288). If we want to define the meaning of populism from the political

point of view, it is difficult. There is no one single ideology behind it. There are promises to normal people (see the example of Hitler above), and people want simple answers for complex questions and problems. This policy is based on a charismatic leader (see the example of Hitler and Mussolini), and simple people and opposition to elites to create new order. Politicians who are populist usually come from a low social, civil, and economic competence (The dictionary of political knowledge, 2021, pp. 384–386). Populism can occur on both the right and left wing, attacking traditional democratic institutions just to keep power in hands of new political group based on ‘normal’ people (Robertson, 2009, pp. 336–337).

Politicians use crises to give promises and start populist policies. In the modern world, the most common useful crisis is economic and hunger, which cause social inequality.

Social inequality according to Penn State University (Pennsylvania, The US) refers to differential access to and use of resources across various domains (e.g., health, education, occupations) that result in disparities across gender, race/ethnicity, class, and other important social markers (The Pennsylvania State University, 2015). Social inequalities have obviously been present during the past, but at the end of 20th century and at the beginning of 21st century, they became more visible in the public sphere and important in national and international policy. Many authorities concentrate on the effects of inequality, how to build society for all, and to turn it into new perspectives, f. e. inequality resulting from gender, age, sexual orientation, or even place of birth, living, or working. That way of making policy is possible because of feminist theory of international relations. The feminist theory of international relations concentrates not only on gender gap, but covers a lot of different topics, and is important in international relations (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001, p. 36).

It should be noted, that before the feminism paradigm in international relations, Marxism pointed out important thought about inequality between two antagonist classes in society. The way in which the world works is based on economics – there is a class that possesses capital (bourgeoisie) and just want to increase its wealth. On the opposite side – there is a class with the ability to work (working class) that works for the class with the capital. Everything in international relations is based on economic (Jackson and Sorensen, 2012, pp. 201–210).

2. The connection between social inequality and the rising wave of populism – the United States of America, Brazil, and Poland

In 2013, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat published a report titled ‘Inequality Matters. Report of the World Social Situation 2013’ about increasing inequality around the world. They concentrated

on important issues in world policy, which were to create more equal societies with access to education, healthcare, well-paid work – and how income is shared by 1% of population of some countries, f. e. one of the richest countries in the world – the United States of America – which has 1% of the population who own about 20% of the income (measured in 2012, after the World Financial Crisis from 2007). The report was also about the situation of minority groups – indigenous people, women, children, etc. The report followed the previous report from 2005 – the answer on how to adapt the Millennial Declaration from 2000 while world leaders pledged to create a more equitable world (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2013). We can see that social inequality is one of the most important problems to solve in the modern world. Social inequality also causes a global wave of populism. The three best examples we can examine are the United States of America, Brazil, and Poland.

The United States of America is always defined as the promised land, where everyone can live the ‘American Dream’ – which means going from being a very poor man to becoming a very wealthy one with access to prosperous social advancement. This is also the home of modern democracy and civil rights, called the oldest modern democracy. In 2007, one of the biggest crashes in contemporary world economy started in the United States. It caused an unemployment crisis and recession both in the US and across the world. At that time, the newly elected president Barack Obama faced a lot of challenges in his presidency (Derengowski, 2016, pp. 826–828). To resolve all these problems, Obama turned to multilateralism in international relations and foreign policy, and also turned more to social in domestic policy (Rudolf et al., 2016, pp. 3–4). Objectively, a good situation did not help the country to save itself from the populism virus, which was spread by next president.

Former President of the United States Donald Trump has sometimes been called a populist or authoritarian populist, for whom the culmination of populism policy could be seen as the storming of the Capitol on January 6th, 2021 – one of the symbols of American democracy – by the people who did not recognise his loss in the election with Joe Biden (Mounk, 2021). In his presidential campaign in 2016, Trump repeated his slogan ‘Make America Great Again’, he ‘wanted’ to restore lost American greatness (Dodds, 2022, p. 29). Inequality was one of the most important issues during the campaign and Trump supporters were people who felt themselves ‘behind’ great politics and felt less important than other society groups, f. e. immigrants, minorities, and crooked politicians. Trump promised great change and used those feelings in an efficient way to move him into national policy. It seemed that he just wanted to fight for normal people’s rights and states stakes (Reeves, 2016).

The United States of America under the Trump Administration withdrew from a lot of important international activities. In the first days of his presidency, on January 30th, 2017, the US withdrew from the major economic initiative that connected countries from the Pacific area – the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) (The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) 2017). In 2019, the US also withdrew from the Paris Agreement to reduce all types of emissions, which, according to President Trump, was unjust to the American people – workers, businesses, taxpayers – and economy; the country had done enough (US Department of State 2017). The other unacceptable stake to the US was the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran (a plan to reduce nuclear weapons and powers in Iran), because it ‘failed to protect American’s national security interests’ and ‘enriched the Iranian regime and enabled its malign behavior’ (The White House Website (archive), 2018). During the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, President Trump warned and declared that his country would withdraw from the World Health Organization, which represented an ‘alarming lack of independence’ from China to solve the problems of the pandemic (Congressional Research Service). Even during his presidential campaign, Trump criticised NATO and shocked member states by stating how unfair this defence alliance was for the United States. He pointed out that American military donations were too high compared to others European allies (Pothier & Vershbow, 2017, pp. 1–2). The most important foundation for international security after the end of the Second World War was undermined not by the main opposite state – Russia – but the main founder state and guarantor of world peace.

President Donald Trump created a new political reality after his inauguration; he wanted to help normal American people in their regular life by withdrawing from a lot of ‘unfair’ international initiatives.

A similar approach was adopted by the former president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro. Brazil is one of the most important states in international policy; it could be next superpower. It is very densely populated, with over 200 million people and a very large territory nears to 8.5 million km² – half of all South America’s territory. The main part of the Brazilian economy is based on the extraction of raw materials and its exports to developed countries (Gawrycki et al., 2011, pp. 148–149). At the beginning of 21st century, Brazil went through a very good economic situation due to the demand of raw materials for developing and developed countries such as China and the Arab states. In the second decade of the 21st century, the country saw stagnation and an increase in inequality between the classes in Brazil. People from the middle classes dropped to the low class, while the rich got richer (Goćłowska-Bolek, 2020, p. 5). These situations were used by Jair Bolsonaro in his presidential campaign.

Jair Bolsonaro had simple solutions for very complex problems. Poverty caused inequality, and consecutively inequality created the process of criminalisation of people's lives. In order to improve their living conditions, people turned to the criminal world and worked, f. e. for the mafia. Bolsonaro promised to stop this process by building more prisons, selling more guns to regular people, and expand military-controlled schools. He also turned to neoliberal politics by privatising almost all state companies and opening the territory of the Amazon Rainforest to foreign businesses (Galvão, 2018). Bolsonaro was regarded by society as a remedy for the crisis and other problems such as corruption (Rojas de Carvalho & Santos Junior, 2019, p. 199). The most controversial action by Jair Bolsonaro after having become president was initiating a massive deforestation of the Amazon – a rainforest known as the 'lungs of the earth', which is extremely important to the global environment, especially during climate changes. The Amazon contains more than 390 billion trees and retains near to 123 billion tons of carbon. It is also one of the oldest forests in the world, a natural habitat for endemic species, and home for some of the first civilisations (Gramer, 2022). The exploitation of the Amazon caused a great deal of damage to the natural environment and was disrespectful to ethnic minorities.

The next example is Poland and its ruling party, Jaroslaw Kaczynski's Law and Justice. In the 2015 campaign, the party talked about the negligence of the ruling coalition, f. e. the failure of security policy due to the Russian annexation of Crimea, the alarming level of social inequality, the large scale of dependence on European Union institutions, and the objection to immigrants from Arab countries and the Middle East. The party won the election with an overwhelming majority and initiated a lot of actions that were and still are very populist and authoritarian (Kowalski, 2018).

The most dangerous of these actions is providing a narrative against the European Union. This can be defined by a statement by one of the most prominent party politicians, Krystyna Pawlowicz, who said (before the party gained power in 2013) that the flag of the European Union is a 'rag (to the floor)'. After the 2015 election, she became a member of the leading power in the Polish parliament, and is now a judge at the Constitutional Court (Bartkiewicz, 2021). The strong objective used to describe the feeling to the European Union, to its flag – the symbol of United Europe – by one of the most noted politicians is terrible. The leader of the party – Mr Jaroslaw Kaczynski – also manifests his firm attitude to this organisation. He accuses it of, f.e.: German domination (especially during the Angela Merkel era) (Dąbrowska & Szuldrzyński, 2017); the spread of 'gender and LGBTQ+ ideology' imposed on normal Polish people against traditional family values and beliefs (dziennik.pl, 2021); and 'madness' related to the plan 'Fit for 55' to reduce carbon emissions by member states (Czermiński, 2021).

Poland is one of the most important member states of the European Union – 74% of Polish trade is connected with other member states, mostly with Germany; the number of Polish representatives in the European Parliament is one of the largest; and it is the sixth largest country for territory and fifth for the number of people (The European Union Website). This narrative is dangerous to regional safety and sexual minorities in Poland. It is also a big game changer for normal people – in the future they would not support the idea of European integration due to belief in this terrible narrative that the European Union is against good of Poland.

3. The impact of populism on international relations, law, institutions, and peace – the modern political entropy

International relations could be interpreted by a lot of paradigms. One of the oldest is realism in international relations. In the beginning, it was only concentrated on economic dependence between countries, how they become wealthy or poor. Over time, realism found a new way of thinking – the international area is in permanent anarchy without any rules and cooperation. The main goal for everyone is to survive and not to look out for others. It could be used by every sort of power to ensure state survival – economic, and in terms of military power (Burchill et al., 2006, p. 97). In this case, states do not see other states' perspective or goods, which could be similar to 'political entropy' – a process produced by populism (populism is produced by social inequality). There are few differences: 1) realism concentrates on real long-term stakes of the state, while populism concentrates only about mid-term stakes; 2) realism takes into consideration international area such as an anarchy without rules, while populism destroys international cooperation using doubts of normal people in institutions; 3) realism and democracy are not enemies, while populism uses democracy to gain power and then takes this like a threat.

The Venezuelan journalist and writer Moises Naim in his studies concentrated on populism and how it affects international politics. He writes that every politician who uses populism rhetoric, works in the same model of policy. First, populists catastrophise everything – the world is sick, dysfunctional and in need to be saved; second, they use external threats to advance their power over the country; third, all democratic institutions are outdated and anachronic. The most important in this model is to be the messiah – that one person or party that can face all problems and provide correct answers for very complex questions (Naim, 2022, pp. 19–21). What should be mentioned is the fact that populists are always against globalisation and consensus with others, but they support each other in

their populist policy in a in very strange way. They are only creating alliances with autocrats because they can then legitimise their undemocratic leading and repressions (Naim, 2022, pp. 349–351).

In the table below, a few chosen examples how modern political entropy is/was created – the populist policies by former president of the United States Donald Trump, former president of Brazil Jair Bolsonaro, and the populist policies of the ruling party Law and Justice in Poland.

HOW MODERN POLITICAL ENTROPY IS CREATING AND AFFECTING ITERNATONAL RELATONS			
Country	The United States of America	Brazil	Poland
The face of entropy	President Donald Trump	President Jair Bolsonaro	The Law and Justice Party
Main reason for populism	Social inequality		
Sphere of influence	Global security and stability	Climate and world nature	Regional stability and security (the European Union)
Possibility political entropy	Collapse of international system shaped after the Cold War	Threat to the world fight against climate change Disrespect for indigenious people	Threat to peace and integration in Europe Threat to minorities
	Threat to democracy around the world Less trust in international organisations, f. e. in the United Nations Denial of world problems – climate change, the spread of authoritarianism, threat to women/LGBT/indigenious people rights More military/economic/ethnic conflicts The end of world peace		

Self-made table: Summary of examples of the United States, Brazil, and Poland

4. How to build a more equal world – true democracy

President of the United States of America Joe Biden in February 2021 said that democracy doesn't happen by accident. We have to defend it, fight for it, strengthen it, renew it (The U.S. Department of State, 2021). This was said at the Summit for Democracy organised by President Biden in 2021 to gather leaders of free world countries together to discuss challenges and opportunities facing democracies. There were three key themes at the meeting: defending against authoritarianism,

addressing and fighting corruption, and promoting respect for human rights. The summit focuses on the great advantage and unique strength of democracy – the ability to acknowledge its imperfections and confront them openly and transparently (The U.S. Department of State, 2021).

Therefore, I think that liberal democracy and Montesquieu's separation of powers are the solution for political entropy. The term democracy came from the Greek words: 'demos', which means the people, and 'kratos', which means power or authority. It is political system based on freedom to vote for all adult civilians of the country. The adjective 'liberal' refers to civil rights included in the constitution, which are defended by the courts (Robertson, 2009, pp. 71–72/76–77). In a real democratic system, all people can vote and think what they want; they have the opportunity to change leader and choose the way in which the country and society should go. Moreover, the people should strive for the separation of powers – it would be guarantee for a single person/dictator/ruling party, f. e. into populist president or government, not adopting absolute power.

Another important issue to resolve the problem of the rising wave of populism and end social inequality is international cooperation based on consensus. A lot of countries have their own priorities – this is not bad – but they are not always going in the same way. Sometimes they exclude less important issues from their domestic or foreign policy, focus on the most principal stakes, and look forward to work together with others on the international area. The best example of this way of making policy is Barack Obama's presidency. He bet on multilateralism – apparently the reason for the weakening role of the United States of America on the global stage – and wanted to create a more equal world for all. He knew that the better the condition of the world, the more improvements would be made for America. He committed to making global developments based on cooperation, f. e. calling for a world food security programme at the London G20 Summit in 2009, launching an energy access programme for Africa (Power Africa) in 2013, and launching the Global Development Lab, Global Innovation Lab, and Global Development Council (The Obama White House, 2016).

The other core of creating a more equal world based on true democracy is education. Populism depends on people's ignorance of various issues – geography, politics, religion, history, etc., on people's fears to others, differences, and the unknown. There should be free access for all people to pure education without any ideology and showing how important democracy and equality is. Through education, we can also pass to the final point, which is to build civil societies around the world. People should know the importance of things such as voting, the right to protest, and association in local organisations. Educated societies choose more democratic politicians, who represent all civilians and respect minorities.

5. Conclusions

After the end of Cold War there was one superpower – the United States of America. Many regional powers wanted to improve their position in international relations and many populist politicians appeared. They used social inequality to gain power. Their populist policy was based on fears and ignorance of people, and they declared their desire to defeat all of problems in a very easy way. The people did not pay attention to non-democratic actions, they wanted their lives to improve in an uncomplicated way.

Populism is not concentrated on long-term stakes of a country or society, but on mid-term stakes and gaining good results easily. In this system, international cooperation or peace is not visible – this system can be referred to ‘modern political entropy’, which means the lack of order in international politics. This policy is dangerous, because populists do not want to make consensus or turn into democratic institutions. Even democracy is seen as a threat for the country.

The recipe for modern political entropy is:

- To turn to real democracy and cherish it with the separation of powers
- International cooperation based on consensus to promote multilateralism in international relations and the state’s foreign policies
- To educate people about what they fear and understand why they do so
- To create civil societies around the world.

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Abstract

This paper is about the connection between the rising wave of populism around the world and social inequality. From resulting political entropy, international relations shaped after the end of the Cold War are changing, and not in a predictable way like before. International law and institutions no longer have an impact and are not respected by the actors.

The first part of paper answers questions of what populism and social inequality are. The second part is about the connection between increasing inequality and populism around the world, with three examples: the United States of America, Brazil, and Poland. In the third part, there is a discussion about the impact of inequality and populism on international relations, law, and peace, and how the new political situation – 'modern political entropy' – is created. The fourth part presents the remedy on how to develop more equal societies and a healthy political system based on politicians who believe in true democracy and respect minorities.

Keywords: political entropy, social inequality, populism, true democracy