

The Influence of Populist Discourse on Social Measures. Case Study: Romania

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Abstract:

Through populist discourse political leaders come into contact with poor people by promises that could improve their living conditions. This study therefore explores the political implications of populism from a social policy perspective, focusing on the concepts and trends that resonate with the field of social policy.

This article highlights the role of populist rhetoric in formulating social policies, examining, on the one hand, the way in which populist discourse is articulated in relation to social policy by the leaders of the main political parties, during the electoral campaign for the parliamentary elections in Romania in 2020, and on the other hand, the extent to which electoral promises are translated into concrete measures in the governance programme.

The study is structured on two distinct but interrelated levels of analysis – populism as political ideology and populism as a style of political communication as we agree that ideas and discourse are central to the success of new governance models.

Also, starting from the critical perspective of critical discourse analysis according to which all speeches are historical and therefore can be understood only in relation to their context, we argue that the populist dominance in the analysed political discourse could be determined not only by the insufficient ideological structure of the selected parties, but also by the specificity of the period of these elections: pandemic-related crisis, economic crisis – in which people need more support and in which frustration has increased..

Through the case study on Romania, we highlight how the use of populist discourse can influence the formulation of social measures in the government program adopted by the coalition that was formed as a result of the 2020 parliamentary elections in Romania. We argue that the populist discourse influences the elaboration of social policies in terms of universal rights, the themes of redistribution being always present in the discourse and in strained relationship with them.

We conclude by considering how this concept allows us to understand how populism appears across the political spectrum, how it translates into the Government programme and its implications for social measures.