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**Capital suggestion**

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**Populist politics**

Populism is the “political science of providing simple answers to complex questions.” Populism is a “thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into homogenous and antagonistic camps, ‘the pure people versus the corrupt elite’”.

Populist politicians offer simple solutions to complex problems. Populist politicians offer overly simple prescriptions in a highly complex world. Here are some examples. Question: Why has the price of sugar gone up by 100 percent? Answer: The mafia has done it. Question: Why has the price of wheat gone up by 100 percent? Answer: The mafia has done it. Question: Why has the price of electricity gone up by 200 percent? Answer: The mafia has done it.

Populism is “as old as democracy”. More recently, countries that have experienced or are currently experiencing populist leaders include the US, the UK, India, Pakistan, Brazil and Russia. A comprehensive study “using a new dataset based on expert ratings for 152 candidates (including 33 populists) having competed in 73 elections worldwide” found that populist leaders rated high on four things.

One, charisma; a populist leader instills “confidence in others that the leader can do the job”. Two, narcissism; an “excessive interest in or admiration of oneself and one’s physical appearance.” Three, psychopathy; “lack of empathy, lack of remorse and insensitivity.” Four, Machiavellianism; a “personality trait centered on manipulativeness.” The same study also concluded that populist leaders rated low on two things: mental stability and conscientiousness.

For the record, populist politics have had five distinct non-economic consequences. One, a fragmented society. Two, increased polarisation. Three, civil unrest. Four, foreign policy disasters. Five, an inability to take collective stance. Populist politics have had at least eight economic consequences: low GDP growth; high budget deficit; low private investment; high inflation; low competitiveness; low productivity; high corruption and the serving of special interests.

Yes, “populists operate within democractic systems.” And, yes, “populism galvanises a large, disillusioned base of overlooked voters and offers them fresh” simplified solutions to their rather complex real-world problems. Research shows that populist leaders are successful in societies with three characteristics: “low personal life satisfaction of voters, frustration with democracy and conspiratorial thinking among voters (this is the demand side of populist politics).” Yes, a standard populist tool is ‘blaming your opponents’ for everything under the sun.

Do populist politicians “represent under or unrepresented” voters? Yes they do. Have populist politicians around the world offered a ‘policy profile’ of their own? By and large, they have not. Donald Trump, in his January 2017 inauguration address said, “For too long, a small group in our nation’s capital has reaped the rewards of government while the people have borne the cost.” That’s unadulterated populism: ‘the pure people versus the corrupt elite’. That’s offering an overly simplified solution to extremely complex real world problems – as opposed to specific solutions or a policy response.

On May 21, PM Imran Khan said: “All mafias have joined hands to get NRO”. That’s ‘pure people versus the corrupt elite’ narrative at its best. As simple as that. Blame the mafia, blame others. Policy response: none.

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