

Institution: UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
Unit of Assessment: D28 Modern Languages and Linguistics
Title of case study: Right-wing populism in contemporary Europe: a contribution to its public understanding
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The principal forms of impact flowing from this body of research lie in two interconnected areas:</p> <p>a) Improving public understanding of right-wing populism, by influencing how journalists around the world and their international audiences, including policy makers, have interpreted its success in Europe and its characteristics (see source 3 below);</p> <p>b) Informing political debate in Italy and Finland concerning populist parties and the strategies the Left should adopt in response to the actions of populists in government (sources 1 and 2). By contributing to such debates, the research has influenced the way members of civil society (such as trade unionists and NGO activists, among others) see right-wing populism in the aforementioned countries. In the case of Italy, it has also helped beneficiaries make sense of the actions of populists in government.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Albertazzi's work has focused on the reasons behind the success of right-wing populists in contemporary Europe, the challenges these parties have posed to the values of Liberal Democracy and the strategies they have deployed whilst in government. The outcomes that have led to the impact have derived mainly from the analysis of the structural factors that have facilitated the emergence of successful right-wing populist parties in some countries, the discussion of the agency of party leaders, the study of the relationship between leaders and the grassroots and the examination of the actions of populists in power (especially the policies they pursue, their relationships with coalition partners and their communications strategies). The main conclusions of this work have attracted the attention of researchers, members of civil society, policy makers and media practitioners, thus leading to the impact. They can be summarized as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Right-wing populists are not necessarily destined to suffer electoral decline or internal splits as a result of participating in government. This is due to their ability to achieve some at least of their key goals whilst in power. (2) A crucial factor determining the success of right-wing populists in government is their ability to focus strongly on a small selection of key themes and impose a framework of interpretation of events regarding these on their lower representative ranks and grassroots members; (3) Parties such as the Northern League in Italy and the Swiss People's Party still rely heavily on voluntary work done by activists. This is essential to their success; (4) Right-wing populists have posed serious threats to fundamental principles of Liberal Democracy through their actions in government. These have been highlighted and discussed by the research. <p>Some of these findings contradict the conclusions reached by much of the available literature on populism. In particular, the research: a) challenges the claim that government participation tends to negatively affect the electoral performance of right-wing populists and the very unity of their parties; b) questions the alleged ineffectiveness of right-wing populists in the field of policy making; c) demonstrates the crucial importance of activism and of effective communication between leaders and the grass roots for the success of some of the parties analysed.</p> <p>The research was carried out by Daniele Albertazzi, permanent member of staff at Birmingham, either as sole or as principal investigator. Duncan McDonnell, an externally funded research fellow at Birmingham between 2008 and 2010, and honorary research fellow from 2011 onwards, collaborated in the researching/writing of some of the outputs listed in Section 3. <i>Resisting the Tide</i> (R2) was co-edited with two members of the UoA (Clodagh Brook and Charlotte Ross); R6 mentioned in Section 3 was co-written with Sean Müller (University of Kent). The research was carried out from 2004 onwards, and is still ongoing. It has been conducted mainly through the following methods:</p>

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- Study of party archives and media material;
- Analysis of selected policies and legislative proposals, leader statements, media appearances, speeches and electoral data;
- Extensive use of interviews, focus groups and questionnaires with representatives and grassroots members from relevant parties.

The latter is the most significant (and original) aspect of the research methodology, since little attention has been paid so far to the study of party members at the micro level, and even less specifically to the views and values of the members of right-wing populist parties. The research has uncovered the experiences of members within the selected parties and their views concerning the strategies deployed by their organisations (especially when in government).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Research Publications:

- R1. *Twenty-first Century Populism-The Spectre of Western European Democracy* (co-edited with D. McDonnell), Palgrave, 2008. (entered REF 2014)
- R2. *Resisting the Tide: Cultures of Opposition Under Berlusconi (2001-06)* (co-edited with C. Brook, C. Ross and N. Rothenberg), Continuum, 2009. (entered REF 2014)
- R3. 'Addressing "the People" – A Comparative Study of the Lega Nord's and Lega dei Ticinesi's Political Rhetoric and Styles of Propaganda', *Modern Italy*, (12) 3, November 2007, pp. 327–347. (entered RAE 2008)
- R4. 'The Lega Nord Back in Government' (with D. McDonnell), *West European Politics*, (33) 6, November 2010, pp. 1318-1350. (entered REF 2014)
- R5. 'Amici fragili: the alliance between the Lega Nord and the Popolo della Libertà as seen by their representatives and members', *Modern Italy*, (18) 1, 2013, pp. 1-18. (entered REF 2014)
- R6. 'Populism and Liberal Democracy: Populists in Government in Austria, Italy, Poland and Switzerland' (with S. Müller), *Government and Opposition*, (48) 3, 2013.

Journal articles and grant applications were subject to a rigorous peer-review process.

External Grants:

- G1. 19 March 2007 (with C. Ross and C. Brook). Large grant (budget FeC: **£84,891**), awarding body: The **British Academy**. Title: 'Resisting the Tide: Cultures of Opposition during the Berlusconi Years'. Final report submitted and accepted.
- G2. 18 July 2007 'Four-month extension of research leave' (budget FeC **£29,063**), awarding body: **Arts and Humanities Research Council**. Title: 'Populists in Power: Rhetoric and Communication Strategies'. Final report submitted and accepted.
- G3. 1 July 2008. '28-month Research project grant' (budget **£62,478**), awarding body: The **Leverhulme Trust**. Title: 'Regionalist vs. Nationalist Populists in Power: Actions and Reactions'. Final report submitted and accepted.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

This research has: a) **helped to shape** the way journalists and media practitioners around the world have interpreted right-wing populism (thus also indirectly affecting their audiences, including policy makers); and b) **influenced** political debate in Italy and Finland. The work was drawn into the public sphere by the growing electoral success of right-wing populists in Europe, including in countries such as Finland, France and the UK, as well as their accession to government (or availability to provide external support to governments), in countries such as Austria, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Switzerland. In the specific cases of Italy and Finland, the research gained particular relevance following, respectively, the accession to power of the Northern League alongside Silvio Berlusconi's People of Freedom in 2008, and the electoral success of the True Finns in 2011. In light of such developments, Albertazzi's work, already well known in the public domain, attracted increased interest (source 3) from journalists and left-wing parties/organisations seeking critical reflection on the nature of right-wing populism, as well as the strategies the left should deploy to respond to the actions of populists in government and/or their electoral success. The impact of the research, further discussed and evidenced in the two sections below, was thus to a large extent driven by its consumers.

1) Improving public understanding of contemporary European populism by influencing media reports, including those reaching policy makers.

Albertazzi has been relied upon as a source of expertise by journalists/media practitioners, and has established a sustained relationship with prominent organisations which regularly draw on his research when covering the parties he writes about. These include, among newspapers and magazines: in the UK, *The Observer* (which quoted from *Twenty-First Century Populism* in its editorial of 30th March 2013), *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*; in Italy, *La Stampa* and *Liberazione*; in Brasil, *O Estado de S. Paulo*; in China, *Sanlian Life Weekly Magazine*; and, in Finland, *Helsingin Sanomat*. Moreover, Albertazzi has also commented on right-wing populism for Italian, British and Australian public service broadcasters, Radio France Internationale, Channel NewsAsia and the newsletter of 'The Civic Institute', a think-tank financed by the Polish political party 'The Civic Platform'. The impact of Albertazzi's work on media practitioners and their audiences is evidenced by the many emails and letters he has received from journalists (source 3). For instance, a journalist writing for *De Groene Amsterdammer* (The Netherlands), stated that Albertazzi provided him with very useful analysis on populism, which **allowed him to show that 'the PVV [i.e. the Party of Freedom] is not an isolated Dutch phenomenon and that there are similarities between European nations'**. Two interviews given by Albertazzi to *De Groene Amsterdammer* were copied and distributed among all Dutch MPs in the daily 'Reader of media articles' produced for Dutch Parliamentarians. The first of these interviews was also quoted extensively by one Dutch MP in his blog; the second saw a very high number of responses on the magazine's website (source 3). Further proof of impact is provided by the statements made by a journalist writing for *Vremya Zavishennih Trebovaniy* – a high profile newsletter through which ideas were discussed in the period leading to the *Global Policy Forum: 'The Modern State in the Age of Social Diversity'*, held in Yaroslavl (Russia) in September 2011. The journalist said that Albertazzi 'provided insight into the nature and characteristics of populism in Europe and **helped the audience gain a better understanding of the detachment between voters and <<the elites>>**' (source 3). Copies of *Vremya Zavishennih Trebovaniy* featuring Albertazzi's interview were distributed to Russian policy makers, including the Administration of the Russian Presidency, and other government institutions, with about 3000 copies being sent to experts on international politics around the world. A journalist writing for the magazine *Marteen!*, argues that Albertazzi's availability to discuss populism helped her to '**understand more of the nature of populism in the UK and the different definitions that are used when discussing populism**', while a reporter from *O Estado de S. Paulo* (Brazil) states that, by contacting Albertazzi, she developed a **better understanding of 'the political context in Italy that time'** [i.e. under the fourth Berlusconi government].

2) Influencing political debate in Italy and Finland. The success of right-wing populist parties in Italy and Finland in recent years has spurred interest in Albertazzi's research among observers of these countries' politics, leading to invitations to contribute to high-profile events attended by diverse audiences, which have impacted on political debates in these countries. The following are prominent examples of such events:

a) The One-day Conference: 'Berlusconi and Beyond: Prospects For Italy', held in Birmingham on 12 February 2010, and organised by The Open University. Albertazzi participated as a roundtable panellist, alongside speakers such as the former editor of *The Economist*, Bill Emmott. The event was attended by journalists from *La Stampa*, *La Repubblica* and *Liberazione*, academics, think-tank researchers, students and the general public (audience c. 60), and focused on the strategies adopted by Italian populists in government from 2001 onwards. The discussion, which uncovered the lack of an effective strategy by the Italian opposition to the Berlusconi government, led to the compilation by panellists of a list of 'Ten questions for Italy's opposition'. Due to the exposure enjoyed by the event in the Italian media - the list was published by four Italian newspapers, including the best selling *La Stampa* and *La Repubblica* - Enrico Letta, then vice-chairman of the major party of opposition, the Democratic Party, agreed to be interviewed on the matter by *La Stampa*. In the interview, published on 14 February, Letta provided answers to each of the 'Ten questions' raised at the conference, thus publicly reflecting on his party's response to the populist challenge in the country, its identity and policy proposals. It was the first time that a very prominent Italian politician - Letta eventually became prime minister in April 2013 - agreed to engage directly and publicly with criticism of his party voiced at an event of this nature. The public debate on these matters continued in the following days, ignited by Letta's response, and led to a lively debate about the strategies of the Italian Left. For instance: the 'Ten questions' were published in Italian on one of *La Stampa's* official blogs and were commented upon by 60 readers (source 4), while on

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the Open Democracy website the English translation of the 'Ten questions' attracted a further 19 comments from readers across the world (ibid.). In addition to this, *La Stampa's* editorial of 21 February was also dedicated to Letta's response.

b) On 10 November 2011, Albertazzi gave a key-note address to the conference '6th Research and Policy Days – the State of Democracy', organised at the Parliament House in Helsinki (audience c. 120). The event was organised by two think-tanks funded by Social Democratic parties: The Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and the Kalevi Sorsa Foundation. Speakers included: the former Social Democratic Prime Minister of Finland and Candidate in the Presidential Elections of 2012, Paavo Lipponen, members of the Finnish Parliament, and policy analysts from a variety of European organisations and think tanks. In the words of one of the organisers, conference attendees came 'from a variety of backgrounds, ranging from party activists, politicians and policy makers, to representatives from civil society organisations, NGOs, trade unions and people with an academic background' (source 1). Albertazzi's contribution, based on article R6 focused on the consequences of populist rule for Liberal Democracy and the strategies Social Democratic parties should adopt in responding to the populist challenge. **The discussion contributed to political debate in Finland in the period leading to the Presidential election of January 2012**, which was also contested by the populist True Finns party. The media provided extensive coverage of the event (source 1), with *Helsingin Sanomat* interviewing Albertazzi on the nature and characteristics of populism in Europe.

c) On 25 November 2011 Albertazzi delivered a key-note speech informed by the findings of his *Twenty-First Century Populism* (R1) to the conference '*Populismo in Europa*', a two-day event held in Rome and funded by Italy's largest Union, the *CGIL* (audience c. 200). The conference brought together members of civil society such as Union representatives, political activists, researchers, academics and students to interrogate the impact of right-wing populists in government on social, welfare and immigration policies, as well as the left's response to them. According to the organiser of the event (source 2), it provided '**a very useful forum for a thorough analysis of policies promoted by populists**'. Its proceedings were published in a special issue of *La Rivista Italiana delle Politiche Sociali* and were made available on U-Tube, where Albertazzi's contribution has been seen by 108 users so far (source 5).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [1] Factual statement provided by Policy Advisor, Foundation for European Progressive Studies.
- [2] Factual Statement provided by Director, *la Rivista delle Politiche Sociali*
- [3] Collated responses from journalists regarding Albertazzi's impact on their work.
- [4] The 'Ten questions' on *La Stampa's* blog: (<http://www.lastampa.it/2010/02/13/blogs/oridente/londra-sferza-il-pd-dieci-domande-all-opposizione-italiana-VrEZWRQUsbnL7WqiZ7gZ8M/pagina.html>), and on the Open Democracy site: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/geoff-andrews/beyond-berlusconi-ten-questions-to-italy%27s-opposition>).
- [5] Contribution to *Populismo in Europa* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EhkfmbqTQ58>)