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# POPULIST RESURGENCE IN SOUTH ASIA: AN EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:**

Envisioning of populism as the charismatic mobilization of mass people in pursuit of political power, this Element examines that populists burgeon where ties between voters and either bureaucratic or clientelistic parties do not exist or have decayed. This is because populists' ability to mobilize electoral support directly is made much more likely by voters not being deeply embedded in existing party networks. This model is used to explain the pervasiveness of populism across the major states in South Asia: Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Srilanka. It excerpts lessons from these South Asian cases for the study of populism.

*Key Words:*

*Populism, Clientelism, Political Parties, Democracy*

## 1. Introduction

It has become common prudence that populism is on the mount across the West: from the American Tea Party to the Front National in France, from Umberto Bossi's Lega Nord and Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement in Italy to new anti-Islamic and anti-immigration parties which actually character liberal-sounding concepts such as 'freedom' and 'progress' in their names. Tony Blair spends his days functioning the Institute for Global Change (IGC), an organisation founded, per its website, "to push back against the destructive approach of populism". In its 2018 world report, Human Rights Watch reprimanded democracies of the world against "capitulation" to the "populist challenge".

No wonder, then, that the Bulgarian political scientist Ivan Krastev or Princeton's professor Jan-Werner Mueller have asserted our time an 'Age of Populism'. Populist leaders are presently in power in several of the world's most populous states and are on the brink of it in many others. South Asia has been no exception to this general trend: India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and even Srilanka have all seen populists come to power in recent years. In India, a populist Prime Minister targeted attacks against religious minorities are on the rise and has legitimized India's more militant groups. Paul Richard Brass, a professor emeritus of political science at the University of Washington, has called the Bajrang Dal "a somewhat pathetic but nevertheless dangerous version of the Nazi S.A."—or the Brownshirts, the Nazi Party's first paramilitary organization.

Yet in spite of the pervasiveness of populism in contemporary South Asia's democracies, the region remains forgotten in the comparative study of populism. It can be featured the recurrent prominence of populism through different phases of South Asian political history since the late 19th century, we can see, its role in mobilizing emergent groups, its concurrence with diverse ideologies and different forms of movement and party organization, the varied effect of populist political forces for democracy, and the different policies constructed by populist discourses and mobilization. In India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh local autonomy was built into the very nature of the colonial state. Party institutionalization has been notably weak and vote buying became prevalent across the region, even in its most durable democracy, the India.

Despite the varied contexts of emergence, modes of expression, patterns of mobilization, and the consequences of political forces that are considered populist, Subramanian observes populism to be a useful analytical category to understand the dynamics of many movements and parties. (Subramanian 1999; Subramanian 2007).

My goals in this paper are distinctly comparative: I draw on the insights of populism studies elsewhere in the world to set out a conceptualization of populism that travels to South Asia. The meaning of populism continues to be much disputed (e.g., Moffitt 2016). A central figure of the debate is whether populism should be understood primarily as a political ideology or as a type of political strategy. There is, of course, no true definition of populism any more than there is a true definition of democracy or justice. What we need therefore is a definition of populism that is useful.

The first section of this paper develops what I call the organizational approach (see Section 2). This approach has its origins in the writings of German sociologist, Max Weber (1978), and has historically been the prevalent way of understanding populism outside Western Europe (Di Tella 1965, Germani 1978, Mouzelis 1985, van Niekerk 1974, Weyland 2001). I define populism in this sense as the charismatic mobilization of mass people in pursuit of political power. Section two explains the organizational conceptualization of populism. Section three discusses existing conceptions for the prevalence of populism in the region and adds flesh to the theoretical framework introduced in Section one. Section four outlines the historical political, economic, and institutional basis for the weakness of national parties in the South Asian region and Section five details how populists have taken advantage of this to appeal directly to voters in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. Section six concludes with some thoughts on what we can learn from these cases on the connection between populism and democracy. The idea that populism is a form of charismatic leadership of the masses implies that populist movements have two chief features that set them apart from bureaucratic or clientelistic parties. First, authority within a populist movement or organization is arbitrary and concentrated in the person of the leader. Second, and relatedly, populism is about the mobilization of the masses toward political ends (Mouzelis 1985). But populist mobilization in a way that differentiates populist parties from either bureaucratic or clientelistic ones (Kenny 2017).

The main contribution of this Element is to see why populists in this organizational sense are successful in South Asia. For reasons explained further in Section three, while it draws on evidences, it focuses on explaining the structural factors that make populist support more feasibly at the aggregate rather than individual level. Existing macro-level theories, either developed out of particular South Asian case studies or from the broader Latin American and European experiences, point to a variety of causes of populist success including economic distress, whether due to long-term shifts in the economy (Autor, Dorn et al. 2016, Roberts 2014b) or short-term crises (Weyland 2006), and demographic shocks, especially due to

immigration (Evans and Chzhen 2013, Kaufmann 2017, Mudde 1999, Rydgren 2008). None of these interpretation works particularly well as a general model of populist success that travels across time and space in South Asia.

The main theoretical assertion of this Element is that populist mobilization thrives where nexus between voters and either bureaucratic or clientelistic parties do not survive or have declined. This explains that they employ frequent public appearances, mass rallies, the traditional mass media, and, increasingly, social media in connecting with voters. South Asia thus provides fertile territory for populist mobilization. For this reason, populism has been historically far more victorious in South Asia and Latin America than in Western Europe, at least until recent years.

Political theorists have long claimed that populists paradoxically pose a threat to the very democratic institutions that allow them to come to power. In seeking to develop and maintain a direct relationship to supporters, populists are inherently flown to erode the intermediary institutions that might get in the way (Urbinati 2015); this includes parties, courts, legislatures, the press, the academy, or any other agency that purports to threat the populist's singular legitimacy. A growing body of empirical research now demonstrates that populists erode democracy across most measurable dimensions (Allred, Hawkins et al. 2015, Houle and Kenny 2018, Huber and Schimpf 2016, Kenny 2017: ch. 2, Kenny 2018, Ruth 2018). Liberal democracy seems to work only when coherent bureaucratic political parties exist to manage it.

## 2. Operational conception of Populism

Populism is a term used with such frequency in both academic and non-academic arena that its meaning can be hard to fix. By almost any measure, populists are a diverse group with seemingly few shared commitments or characteristics. Populism literally refers to "a practice, system, or doctrine of the people." How exactly this people-centric form of politics be envisioned of and operationalised remains an open question.

Populist movements or parties can be marked from both bureaucratic and clientelistic organizations based on how they are structured internally and how they mobilize support externally (Kenny 2017). In this sense, populism can be inferred as the charismatic mobilization of mass people in pursuit of political power. The exercise of authority within bureaucratic parties is bound by rules and procedures, while externally they are founded on stable institutionalized relationships with supporters (Panebianco 1988, Sartori 1976). Equally, in patrimonial organizations, authority is both traditional and transactional. Leadership is often inherited and privileges are distributed to supporters in return for their

loyalty. Externally, such patronage-based parties engage in a quid pro quo with supporters in which votes are exchanged for particularistic material benefits (Eisenstadt and Roniger 1980, Hicken 2011, Scott 1972, Stokes, Dunning et al. 2013). Charismatic authority is instead characterized by the concentration of arbitrary control in the person of a popularly acclaimed leader.

For Weber (1978), a leader is charismatic only to the extent that his followers treat him as such. As he put it, "It is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma" (242). To the extent that charismatic leadership is possible in more conspiratorial form – think of Hitler's Nazi Party of the early 1920s or Lenin's Bolshevik faction prior to the First World War – we have to draw a further disparity between mere charismatic leadership and populism. A large mass of the people is critical to populism in a way that is distinct from charismatic leadership per se. Hence populism refers to the charismatic mobilization of a mass movement.

Populists seek to connect directly with the masses who become their supporters. Supporters are mobilized less by clientelistic ties or membership in aligned parties or civil society organizations than they are by a direct affinity for the leader (Weyland 2001: 14, Wiles 1969: 167). Populism is not simply a synonym for presidential mobilization in weak party systems or for independent campaigning more generally. Populists lead mass movements in the sense that followers develop an affinity for a collective project (itself, however, ill-defined) that is identified with a leader (Hoffer 1951).

Charismatic leaders do sometimes depend on material inducements and party and civil society organizations to mobilize voters. While the targets of populist mobilization are likely to be unattached or swing voters, this is not a defining feature of populism, but a tendency that varies from one context to another in its intensity.

## 3.The Causes of Populism in South Asia

Although individual cases of populist success in South Asia have been discussed in various books and articles, there have been few efforts to develop a more general model of populist success in the South Asian region. Most of the general theories of populist success come from the differing experiences of Western Europe and Latin America. In this section, I first review these various theories before presenting a populist trend in South Asia.

### 3.1. Analysing Populism under theoretical framework

Until lately, the predominant approach to understanding populism has been to focus on the type(s) of macro-level social and economic conditions in which populists supposedly develop. Indeed, this was the approach of the earliest systematic academic treatment of the subject (Ionescu and Gellner 1969) and is the approach followed in this Element. This general approach has taken two broad forms. The first has been to look toward long-term macro-structural developments such as economic modernization and political status quo.

A number of authors have argued that populists, especially in Western Europe, have gained at the expense of non-populist parties because the latter have moved away from the interests of their supporters. In particular, in response to the structural economic crisis of the 1970s, social democratic parties are alleged to have abandoned their traditional support for full employment and the welfare state, thus losing the backing of their traditional working- class supporters. This in turn has led to a rise of a distinct brand of populism that combines hostility toward immigrants with a return to the post-war welfare state, or a kind of welfare chauvinism (Bornschier 2010, Judis 2016, Mouffe 2005). Analogously, scholars have argued that the embrace of neoliberalism in Latin America broke the long-standing ideological linkages between parties, especially labour parties, and voters (Lupu 2016, Roberts 2014a). Although this model of ideological party-system dealignment makes some sense for Western Europe, where partisan political cleavages along economic policy were relatively clear and stable (Bornschier 2010), this logic is problematic in most South Asian (or Latin American) cases, where mainstream parties typically have been indistinguishable in policy terms. That is, ideological dealignment theory can arguably work where prior ideological alignments are themselves clear. However, even in such circumstances, this approach probably overstates the ideological congruence between parties and voters (Kinder and Kalmoe 2017).

However, in a slightly different formulation, the dealignment theory provides some useful insights. Dealignment in this different sense is more of a social than an ideological process. Some of the original models of populist success in Latin America looked to deep structural changes in society and the economy to explain the decline of establishment parties and the emergence of populist alternatives. These processes of modernization and urbanization disrupted the networks of patronage-based parties and made the success of populist mobilizers such as Juan Perón in Argentina more likely (Collier and Collier 2002). We can see the element of this dynamic playing out across contemporary developing Asia (Berenschot 2010, Swamy 2013).

A number of authors have argued – specifically with reference to South Asia – that it is the structural economic exclusion of the urban proletariat and other groups that has given rise to populist mobilization. The rise of so-called Islamic populist movements and offers some more clarity. Islamic movements have sought to unite a sociologically diverse coalition of "upwardly mobile members of the middle class, excluded members of entrepreneurial groups and downtrodden members of the lumpen proletariat," in opposition to the ruling secular elite. Yet not all populists operate in this way. Indeed, evidence from the West Bengal of India indicates that Mamata's support comes not just from the "left behind" or struggling middle classes but also from the well to do.

The diversity of populist's support basses makes any attempt to explain the success of populist movements as a direct result of underlying class cleavages problematic. A possible resolution to this problem turns on the role of identity. Perhaps one of the few consistent characteristics of populists is that they claim – explicitly or implicitly – to represent the people (Canovan 1999, Mudde 2004). The people might be conceived of in nationalist, religious, ethnic, or other terms. Populist mobilization in these cases might be interpreted as a response to challenges to a political community defined in terms of a particular identity. In Europe, this has often manifested itself as the opposition of "native" populations against non-European (especially Muslim) immigrants; in the United States, resurgent white nationalist sentiment opposes both Latino immigrants and African Americans; in South Asia, such identity-based mobilization has typically been drawn along the lines of domestic majority-minority ethno-religious cleavages. In India, for example, the ruling BJP, a Hindu nationalist party that has many populist characteristics, has struggled in recent state elections. The BJP's violent, Hindu nationalist rhetoric has sparked a vigilante campaign largely targeting minorities, while the party has overseen growing attacks on the press and other classic populist tactics. Another approach to this question has been to focus on populism as a set of individual attitudes that cuts across typical economic interests and sociocultural identities. Taking the view that populists offer a distinctive ideological platform that is pro-people, anti-elite, and Manichean, scholars have posited that populist parties are successful because they tap into widely held "populist" sentiments (Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser 2018). There is an empirical relationship between populist attitudes and support for populists. One of the best-developed areas of research on populism focuses on the economy. The theory runs that voters abandon established parties for populist alternatives following acute economic crises. Under such conditions, populist opposition to existing institutional arrangements attains widespread appeal.

### 3.2. Fragmented party system and populist strength

What is missing in these various theories is a consistent model of why non populist parties have only weak and contingent ties to voters and why populism is the specific response to that weakness. The underlying configurations of party–voter linkage make a polity more or less vulnerable to populist mobilization. At sometimes and places these linkages are stable while at others they are not. In South Asia, bureaucratic party–voter linkages have been relatively uncommon, with only Communist and some identity-based parties adopting this type of institutional linkage with their supporters. Thus, models that focus on ideological party system dealignment have limited applicability to the region. The main forms of linkage in South Asia have been clientelistic and authoritarian, with populist linkages emerging as a frequent challenger to them.

There have many ups and downs, grappled with multiple tensions, and suffered from serious shortcomings in the course of the evolution of parties in South Asia. While parties have operated under democracy in some countries and under authoritarian regimes at other times. The inability of the party leaders to advance norms for democratic competition to contest and win elections and to create a capacity for the party to function as a ruling party as well as an opposition party had a lasting effect on the party system in South Asia. Distrust and intolerance of the opposition parties as well as intimidation and political vendettas have become regular features of party politics in the region. This has been a major source of confrontationist attitudes in the party structure in some countries, especially in the initial decades after independence. India and Bangladesh have undergone this experience in their own ways.

However, the mere fact that non-populist national parties have weak connections with voters creates the opportunity for populist outflanking does not guarantee that it will occur or that it will be successful. To understand why populism is so often a successful strategy in these cases, we need to consider the difficulty faced by alternatives and the particular resources and strategies that populists by definition can employ.

First, the specific configuration of patronage-based party systems makes populist mobilization a much more likely outcome than the emergence of a bureaucratic party rival. Because in patronage democracies political ties take the form of vertically integrated patron–client factions, movements based on broad-based national organizations (e.g., Labor unions) are more difficult (though of course not impossible) to form (Kuo 2018, Ziblatt 2017). Second, populists' use of public appearances, mass rallies, the traditional mass media, and increasingly social media makes for a relatively low cost means of connecting with masses of

voters. Of course, all political parties use such tactics to a degree. Third, contrary to the idea that the supporters of populists are not motivated by policy while the supporters of bureaucratic parties are, this framework posits that policy appeals may be highly relevant to populist voters. Because populists are not institutionally tied to clear interest groups, it is often the case that their messaging is vague on policy specifics, especially on the economy.

In sum, populism thrives as an efficient (low cost) form of political mobilization where bureaucratic and centralized clientelistic party building is inhibited. The only credible alternatives in such circumstances are looser and contingent patronage-based networks or coalitions, or, as has frequently happened, authoritarianism. While this model travels well to South Asia, a number of questions arise: What explains the origins of these fragmented patronage-based political structures? If broker autonomy is detrimental to the formation of strong national parties, why have central political elites not prevented it, especially given the long periods of authoritarian rule in each of these cases that might have allowed for such top-down institutional engineering?

These questions force us to look to the deeper political economic roots of party systems (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Trivially, we can say that political systems in democracies should reflect the balance of social, economic, and political power in a society (Boix 1999, Cusack, Iversen et al. 2007). For example, if landlords and other elites dependent on the primary sector largely control the economy, the justice system, and the prevailing social order, we would expect any political party system to be a reflection of their interests. At the same time, a more industrialized economy should go hand-in-hand with greater opportunities for labor to organize and gain political representation (Rueschemeyer, Huber et al. 1992); The more industrialized an economy, the more likely party voter linkages are to be bureaucratic (Kuo 2018, Stokes, Dunning et al. 2013: ch. 8). The composition of a country's political economy thus has a significant impact on the system of party–voter linkages and the likelihood of populist mobilization being successful.

## 4.Fragmented Parties and Inter-party competition

This section examines the history of party development in South Asia with a focus on the Pakistan, India, and Srilanka, explaining why, with some exceptions, democratic parties have been so fragmented across the region.

The party systems in the countries of the region have been in a state of flux. Since the countries began their journey towards democracy in the 1950s, several older parties in the region have been eclipsed or have slowly faded out, while others have undergone substantial

changes in their organizational structures, policies and programmes, electoral support bases, geographical spread and functioning. They combine with other parties to forge alliances or adjust to the changing international economic and political environment. Parties everywhere have been involved in intense political competition. There has been a proliferation of parties, more so in India and Nepal. Parties have been splitting, coming together and splitting again in India, Pakistan and Nepal. In the last two decades, the party domain in the region has become very crowded with the presence of numerous parties. Several new parties have emerged based on nationalistic, regional, religious, caste and ethnic identies.

According to the Department of Elections official website, there are 53 parties in Sri Lanka. About 10 (ten) Tamil parties and other 05 (five) parties that claim to represent Muslims. Jatika Hela Urumaya (JHU) is the party of Buddhist monks. Nine registered parties and two hundred one independent groups participated in the parliamentary elections in July 2015. Many thinks that the introduction of PR in Sri Lanka has led to the growth of small parties— mostly ethnic-based, religious or extremist. Since the major parties are forced to forge alliances with small parties to form governments, this has reinforced the ethnic divisions on party lines and resulting to an exacerbation of social tensions.

In July 2018, Pakistanis voted was the third consecutive transfer of power from one civilian government to another in the country's 71-year history. However, the months leading up to the elections demonstrated the power of the military, and its ability to influence election results and control sections of the media.as Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leader Imran Khan seemed poised for a win, opposition parties cried foul, stating that the election was stolen from them. Lack of trust among the parties is on the pick in Pakistan. In the case of many Pakistani parties the distinguishing line between a faction and a party is very thin. Even Bangladesh, the least pluralist nation in the region, has witnessed an increase in the number of parties. While the number of political parties in Bangladesh can be estimated at over 100, only 39 are officially registered. The Islamic parties have much influence due to country's one particular religion majority.

India has also witnessed the gradual emergence of new parties in recent years. Several national and regional parties took shape as the Janata Party fell apart in early 1980s. The old Jan Sangh reappeared as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 1980. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) grew in strength as the party of the dalits. A number of new regional parties have emerged and captured power in the states. In India, the party splits are too many to reckon. The Janata Party and the later the Janata Dal have split so many times that all those parties that sprang up from the same source are called the Janata Parivar (family). Even the parties

that have grown on regional and caste identities have split several times. For example, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), a state party in Andhra Pradesh, has split four or five times. There are about four groups of the Kerala Congress, which claims to represent the interests of the Christians. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) has split several times, giving rise to several other bigger and smaller parties. The Akail Dal in Punjab has split several times, and at any point in time many groups claiming the status of the original Akail Dal can be found (Rizvi 2015).

It appears that parties tend to fragment more easily where political elites and the electorate do not find shifting of loyalties for the sake of power particularly objectionable. Fragmentation of parties could also be due to the possibilities that open up in the times of hung parliaments, alliances and unstable governments. The splits could also be attributed to the inability of the major parties to recognize diversities—social, regional, linguistic, religious, cultural and ethnic—and accommodate representatives of these diverse groups in positions of power. Political incorporation in South Asia has largely taken the form of patron–client mobilization (Scott 1972). Due to their local political influence, brokers inhibited the formation of coherent conservative and social democratic parties.

The pattern of inter-party competition is structured by the political context in which parties function. We have noted in the previous section that parties in Pakistan and Bangladesh had to muddle through the muddy waters of politics and military control for long periods. Parties floated or supported by the military had swept elections in both these countries. The First Past The Post (FPTP) system had contributed to huge majorities in legislatures disproportional to the vote percentages in India and Sri Lanka (prior to the introduction of PR in the latter). In addition to this, the splits in the established parties and the founding of new parties had affected inter-party competition in the countries.

It is now a conventional scenario in Bangladesh is political supper race between Bangladesh's two major political parties, the AL and the BNP; and, secondly, the conflict over the trial of Islamist war criminals and contestations over the question of whether political Islam should be granted a legal space in the country's democratic system. Political deadlock and violent conflict between the AL and the BNP have characterised national elections since the country's return to democratic rule in 1990 resulting democratic institutions are weak and lack independence. machines. Pakistan's political parties have invariably been fiefdoms of the top leaders who run them like oligarchic political machines. Most parties are identified by their leader and, if you exclude that leader, the party becomes a ship without a rudder.

## 5. Politics of Religion and Establishing (Patronage) Democracy in South Asia

The political and economic legacies of colonialism had a significant impact on party building in South Asia. However, subsequent socioeconomic change, institutional innovation, and external shocks, whether political (e.g., military) or economic, also impacted on party development in the region.

Given India's excessive divisions along caste, class, regional, and religious lines, the stability of the country's democracy is puzzling. Piliavsky's contributors, most of whom are anthropologists, offer fresh insights into the ways in which religious feasts, patronage handouts, and petty bureaucratic favors both support and undermine the state. Their essays, of varying quality, push back against the conventional interpretation of patronage as a merely instrumental form of exchange. But generosity requires resources, as the patron turns votes into power and power into patronage. The public admires such behaviour when it appears to be a form of benevolence and considers patronage democratic when it appears to support accountability- but revile it as corrupt when it's instrumental purposes emerge too starkly.

Another source of solidarity between politicians and their publics is the Indian practice of coming together in common spaces for worshiping. Chhibber examines survey data to show that Indians are deeply religious, with strong majorities reporting that they engage frequently in collective prayers, rituals, and festivals. Although the four major religious communities— Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian—do not mix much, each group's worship practices bring together people from different castes and classes.

As said earlier, South Asian countries are polyethnic and have substantial minority population. Secularism in the region has taken a variety of trajectory. For example, in order to safeguard minorities and integrate them Indian states recognised religious minorities in the Constitution and promises to intervene in religious matters to promote their culture. The principles such as sarva dharma sambhav (equal treatment to all religions) and dharmanirpekshta (non-partisan) are the facets that unfold secularism and religious pluralism in India. Article 44 of the Constitution of India calls for the creation of Uniform Civil Code (UCC).

The pressures from elites, instable governments and military coups in Pakistan have made the state adopt Islam as state religion. Similar is the case with Bangladesh. In Sri Lanka, like India, the majority groups regularly pressurised the state to announce 'their religion' (read Buddhism) as state religion. Similarly, use of religion for political means was always a state of affair, though it did not surface till the 1980s. globally, it is related to phenomenon of growing nexus between religion and politics. Internally, it is related to changing political

economy, practices of secularism and various forms of marginalities which contest for greater share in political power and legitimisation of authority.

In the most democratic countries, the authority of the church was challenged and alternatives were developed. Such was not the case in South Asia. South Asian region, unlike the West, neither had a central religious authority nor a unified religious community that binds discrete communities around a single sacred scripture or single religious belief. The religious communities were divided around language and region. A unified Islam or Hindu in Indian subcontinent was absent (Hasan 1997 and Nandy 1998). In India, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) started mobilising Hindus around issues of Hindu rashtra (Nation). The case in Pakistan is more severe. Though created alongside India, the initial leadership did not succeed in creating a secular nation (Ahmed 2011). 'there are a number of smaller parties which take Islam as their principle political creed' (Riaz 2011: 15). It is evident from the above discussion that it is highly untenable to keep religion away from politics in South Asia. Nandy (1998) and Madan (1998) opined that secularism has been forced upon in a religious society.

## 6.Populism and Democracy

Everyone seems to agree that democracy is under attack. We've seen this before. Bolsonaro's rise to power is only the latest chapter in a global resurgence of right-wing, illiberal populism. Far-right populist parties across Europe have seen a surge in public approval, making parliamentary gains in 15 of the 27 EU member countries over the past two election cycles. Far-right parties like in Italy, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and Estonia made the most significant gains winning 5 percent more in vote shares.

The antagonism between populism and democracy is no coincidence and it is not unique to South Asia. Rather, in seeking to establish and maintain a direct relationship to supporters, populists are inherently driven to erode the intermediary institutions that might get in the way (Urbinati 2015); this includes parties, courts, legislatures, the press, the academy, or any other agency that purports to challenge the populist's singular legitimacy. Moreover, the lack of formal or informal internal party constraints on populist leaders further frees them from adhering to democratic rules of the game (Kenny 2018). however, certain populist forces limited redistribution to lower strata and increased conflicts between middle castes and low castes. Indeed, a growing body of empirical research now demonstrates that populists erode democracy across most measurable dimensions (Allred, Hawkins et al. 2015, Houle and Kenny 2018, Huber and Schimpf 2016 , Kenny 2017: ch. 2, Kenny 2018)

Populist rule in South Asian region can certainly tend toward the authoritarian. Although Inder Kumar Gujral and Manmohan Sing have not directly eroded democracy to the same extent as Atal Bihari Vajpayee or Narendra Modi, it would be premature to suggest that there is something fundamentally different about the circumstances that give rise to these more "moderate" cases of populist rule. What the South Asian cases reveal is a persistent three-way tension between patronage-based democracy, populism, and military-authoritarian centralism. Yet neither Modi nor Sirisena made much attempt to move their parties in a more bureaucratic direction. Rather their populist strategies provide a strong signal that political power in India and as well in Srilanka does not depend on party building.

## 7. Ray of Future Hope

Several South Asian countries, however, suffer from the opposite problem: rather than elected politicians interfering with independent institutions, autonomous militaries can interfere in civilian politics. Many problems play a vital role in south Asian politics such as ethnic and religious majoritarianism, attacks on independent institutions, ethnicity, nationalism, regionalism, class, and patriarchy—do not outweigh the many advantages of liberal democracy. But South Asia's experience shows that progress and backsliding can be difficult to distinguish.

The beginning of the 21$^{st}$ century would provide some ray of hope for democracy in South Asia (Sen, 1999: 3-17). However, similar to the global trend, there is no "third reverse wave" of democracy (Fukuyama, 1992: 42-43) here. Again, distrust in authority is immense in this region, but at the same time, democracy has become an automatic choice among the masses. Like other parts of the world, democracy "has become like a 'default' setting in a computer program" (Diamond, 2015: 141-155). This enormous support is the main hope for South Asian democracy.

An altogether different direction of state affairs is being seen in India under the umbrella of BJP with the components of RSS, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, it may be expected that India would overcome its difficulty of establishing democracy at least in the formal sense of the term. The elections in Bangladesh, both 2014s and 2018s election, frustrated the nation and earned negative reputation for the country in international arena. But a careful look at the political sphere shows that they accept parliamentary democracy as a form of government and market economy as the basis of development and also started to realize the importance of fulfilling the prerequisites for a meaningful liberal democracy. In case of Pakistani politics which attained one more mentionable success in March 2013 when the National Assembly,

the lower house of the Parliament, completed a full term for the first time and now Imran Khan is trying to overcome democratic lacking. The October crisis in Srilanka, when the country's president, Maithripala Sirisena, tried to oust the prime minister and replace him with a former president, Mahinda Rajapaksa violating constitution, proved willingness to defend democracy.

## 8.Conclusion

Among the more fascinating themes in contemporary South Asia has been the long journey of democracy riding on populist horse. Not surprising, populism is now a worldwide phenomenon. From American Trump to Turkish Erdogan or Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro are using populist tool as for mobilizing mass people for political goal. South Asian countries are also walking in that way but also showing a ray of hope for bright future. Regardless of all the discouraging incidents that are taking place quite frequently, there are encouraging events taking place in South Asia in the new century in the political sphere.

Populist leaders endeavour to fabricate direct or unmediated affinity with their followers, whether through mass rallies, mass media, or social media tools such as Twitter. This antipathy toward intermediation translates into the erosion of checks and balances on executive power when populists gain office. While populists often mobilize parts of the population previously ignored by established parties, they also often look to demobilize their opponents. Populism in South Asia, as elsewhere, has thus had not had a positive effect on democracy. Given the persistent absence of bureaucratic parties in the region, the prospect of further democratic erosion remains high.

 Democrats in South Asia thus have to contend not only with the socioeconomic and technological changes that have weakened bureaucratic parties everywhere, but also with their particular disadvantageous historical legacies. This does not mean we need to accept the Huntingtonian view that developing countries are "not ready" for democracy (Huntington 2006); rather it means that to the extent that liberal democracy remains a worthy goal – as Churchill put it, "the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried" – it means at the same time as building bureaucratic parties, Democrats need to find ways of fostering robust, open, and non-sectarian civil societies, developing effective state institutions, and addressing socioeconomic inequalities.

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