

Elitism, Populism, and School Choice

M. Danish Shakeel, Harvard University

Robert Maranto, University of Arkansas

In modern times, loyalty to the nation state often superseded other social divisions. Under postmodernism, however, elite status markers have stimulated populist and even nativist political responses. With Brexit, the Trump election, the French Yellow Vest movement, and the Italian Five Star movement in the West, not to mention the rise of Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, at least at the ballot box, we live in a populist period.

The current global political ascendance of populism has led to increased research on populist movements and attitudes (Hawkins, Kaltwasser, & Andreadis, 2018). Nationally representative surveys attempt to measure populist attitudes (Castanho Silva, Jungkunz, Helbling, & Littvay, 2019; Van Hauwaert, Schimpf, & Azevedo, 2019). Populists typically resent educated elites. Yet research on populism's impacts on education related issues is scarce. Notably, populism is associated with distrust of political institutions and with low internal/external political efficacy (Anduiza, Guinjoan, & Rico, 2019; Geurkink, Zaslove, Sluiter, & Jacobs, 2019). We do not know how these aspects of populism relate to schools as institutions, nor to school choice.

Elite intellectuals like Milton Friedman (1962) provided much of the theorizing behind the global movement for school choice; yet the concept suits populism. School choice is the ultimate populist reform, allowing parents rather than experts to decide the educational program(s) working best for their children. Experts *may* have more formal knowledge, but parents have more local knowledge and far more skin in the game, a theme of many of the essays in the 2018 Greene and McShane edited volume examining decades of education policy innovations, titled *Failure Up Close*. Moreover, while traditional technocratic reforms tended to empower central offices and disempower teachers (Mehta, 2013), school choice permits teachers to start and run their own schools (Maranto, 2015). In short, for both consumers and providers, we can conceptualize choice as empowering the powerless, at the expense of often arrogant experts and distant governing boards. Further, a substantial body of work including *Journal of School Choice* articles such as Hammack (2016) indicates that school choice facilitates social mobility. Yet, in the U.S. and likely much of the world, support for choice disproportionately comes from the center rather than the periphery.

Further, discussions of populism must consider religion. While Western elites increasingly eschew faith, much of the public still embraces it. From America to Kazakhstan, faith-based communities marginalized by the state have long sought choice, often successfully (see works within Maranto & Shakeel, 2020). The upcoming US presidential election offers a ripe opportunity for researchers to engage in research on populism and school choice in United

States. Carefully designed surveys could shed some light on the ties between various aspects of populism and support for school choice.

To explore these and related issues, M. Danish Shakeel and Robert Maranto invite manuscripts exploring any aspect of populism and school choice. Manuscript drafts are due June 15, 2020, and must survive peer review. Tentatively, the special issue will be published January 2021, Volume 15, number 1 of the *Journal of School Choice*. We hope to republish it as a book in 2022. You may submit your paper using the instructions given at the website of the journal. In your cover letter, please indicate that this submission is for the special issue on populism. Ideally, manuscripts should run from 3,000 to 7,000 words, though we will consider other sizes. Manuscripts should have APA style and come in two files, one with full affiliation and contact information and a second with author names and references scrubbed off. We seek a mix of empirical pieces and conceptual, legal, or historical essays. For additional information, please contact danish_shakeel@hks.harvard.edu and rmaranto@uark.edu.

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