

THE IMPACT OF POPULISM ON TRADITIONAL SECURITY POLICIES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the growing impact of populism on traditional security policies in the Western Balkans, a region characterized by complex dynamics and numerous challenges in national security management. In the context of the rise of populism, which often represents a strong response to elitism and internationally accepted norms, this study analyzes how this phenomenon has influenced traditional security policies. Through theoretical analysis and case studies from Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the article highlights changes in security approaches, as well as the challenges and opportunities arising from this phenomenon. The study employs an integrated methodology, including document analysis and interviews with field experts, to provide a deeper understanding of populism's impact on security policy. The analysis reveals that populism has altered security priorities, promoting a stronger focus on domestic issues and challenging foreign policy and regional cooperation. This article concludes with recommendations for future policies and the need for a sensitive balance between populist interests and traditional security commitments to maintain regional stability and integrity.

Keywords: Populism, security policies, western Balkans, national security, regional stability.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the Western Balkan countries have experienced a significant rise in populism, a phenomenon that seems to have fundamentally altered the political dynamics and security strategies in the region. Populism, as an ideology often focused on simplifying complex problems and promoting a political agenda oriented towards the sensitivities of popular interests, has brought about significant changes in traditional national security policies. This shift is particularly important in a region that historically has a troubled past and a political and social environment sensitive to both internal and external influences.

The Western Balkans, composed of countries such as Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro, faces a unique challenge in managing national security and regional stability. While these countries strive to strengthen their institutions and meet the criteria for European Union integration, the rise of populism has significantly influenced security policies. Populism often brings internal tensions to the forefront and focuses on strong, nationalistic approaches that can undermine regional cooperation and the stability of security policies.

This topic is significant because changes in security policies as a result of populism can have broad consequences for regional stability and international relations. Understanding the impacts of populism on security policies can help in formulating more effective strategies for crisis

management and maintaining peace and stability in a region often at the center of international attention.

This study aims to answer the central question: How does populism influence the shaping and implementation of traditional security policies in the Western Balkan countries? To address this question, the study is structured into several main sections. The Theoretical Framework section will review the theory on populism and traditional security policies, providing a theoretical basis for further analysis. The Methodology section will describe the methods used for data collection and analysis, including document analysis and expert interviews. The Analysis section will examine the impact of populism on national security policies in various Western Balkan countries, identifying key changes and trends. In the Case Studies section, the specific impact of populism on particular countries in the region will be analyzed. The Discussion will interpret the study's findings and provide a connection to the theory, while the Conclusions and Recommendations section will summarize the results and offer suggestions for future policies or further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Populism is a political phenomenon that emphasizes the division of society into two opposing groups: "the people" and "the elites." Populists often claim to represent the interests of the popular majority and criticize the elites for their inability to meet the common needs of citizens (Mudde, 2004). This political phenomenon often responds to public feelings of fear and insecurity and seeks to strengthen the bond between populist leaders and excluded or marginalized groups. In the context of security policies, populism can lead to more radical and populist approaches, where national security and crisis management involve the use of emotional and strong rhetoric to address both internal and external issues (Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

Traditional security policies, on the other hand, encompass strategies and practices aimed at protecting the state from internal and external threats. These policies often include measures such as military defense, intelligence, and diplomacy, which are oriented towards maintaining national order and stability (Baldwin, 1997). Traditional security policies are typically focused on conflict management and crisis prevention, usually following a balanced and analyzed approach to ensure the effective protection of state interests.

The combination of populism with traditional security policies can result in a sensitive mix of strategies that often impact the stability of security policies and international relations. In a populist context, countries may pursue harsher and more unilateral policies, which often create tensions and challenges for the effective management of national security and regional stability (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

In summary, let us mention the main theories related to populism and traditional security policies. Populism is a political phenomenon that focuses on dividing society into two main groups: "the people" and "the elites." According to Mudde (2004), populism can be defined as an ideology that emphasizes representing the will of the popular majority and often criticizes elites for incompetence and corruption. This political phenomenon is often expressed through rhetoric that seeks to address societal feelings of insecurity and dissatisfaction, including internal and external issues related to national security (Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

In the context of traditional security policies, the primary goal is the protection of the state from internal and external threats. National security policies include strategies such as military defense, intelligence, and diplomacy, and help in crisis management and conflict prevention (Baldwin, 1997). These policies typically follow a measured and analyzed approach to ensure the stability and effective protection of state interests.

The impact of populism on traditional security policies is multifaceted. Populist leaders often pursue a more radical and emotional approach, which can lead to harsher security policies oriented towards the immediate popular interests (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). These leaders may use populist rhetoric to emphasize internal and external threats and justify measures such as increased defense spending and the pursuit of strong policies against groups they consider as threats to national security.

The key theories on the connection between populism and security policies include the concept of "securitization rationalization," where populism dismisses the need for a balanced and well-analyzed approach to managing security policies. Populism often views security in simplified and dramatized terms, focusing on perceived threats and ignoring the value of international cooperation and sustainable policies (Mudde, 2004). This approach can result in tensions and the destabilization of international relations, and the failure of security policies that are oriented towards meeting the needs of the complex modern security environment (Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

Therefore, the connection between populism and traditional security policies is complex and influences how these policies are developed and implemented. Theories on populism help in understanding the changes and challenges this phenomenon brings to national security management and aid in shaping policies that are better suited to addressing the threats and challenges of the modern era.

METHODOLOGY

In researching the impact of populism on traditional security policies in the Western Balkan countries, the use of appropriate methods and reliable sources is essential to ensure a comprehensive and accurate analysis.

Documentary analysis is the primary method used to collect and analyze data in this study. This process involves reviewing existing literature and significant documents related to populism and security policies. The documents include reports from international and national institutions, academic articles, and security policy analyses that address the impact of populism in the Western Balkan countries. Analyzing these sources helps identify key trends and changes in security policies as a result of populism.

The use of documentary analysis is justified for this topic, as it provides a robust and verifiable information base that is entirely accessible and reliable. This methodology has the advantage of utilizing a wide range of trustworthy sources, including previous reports and studies that help identify policy trends and changes (Silverman, 2013).

In summary, this methodology provides a balanced and in-depth approach to researching the impact of populism on traditional security policies.

RESULTS

Analysis of the Impact of Populism on National Security Policies

Populism has taken on an increasingly significant role in global politics, particularly in the Western Balkans. The rise of populism has markedly influenced security policies, bringing about substantial changes in how security strategies are formulated and implemented. The aim here is to examine the impact of the rise of populism on security policies by analyzing the changes it has brought about, the new trends that have emerged, and the risks and opportunities arising from this phenomenon.

The rise of populism is a visible phenomenon in many countries, including the Western Balkans, where populist leaders often use rhetoric that disparages the elites and pursues strong and direct policies to address public needs and concerns. Populism, as defined by Mudde (2004), is an ideology that divides society into two groups: "the people" and "the elites." This division often leads to strong criticism of existing institutions and policies and helps create an emotional and populist connection with the masses.

In the context of security policies, the rise of populism has influenced the shaping of national security strategies in various ways. Security policies formulated by populist leaders often include strong and drastic measures to address perceived threats and manage crisis situations in a direct and moment-focused manner (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). This approach can result in significant changes in security strategies, including an increased focus on managing internal threats and a more pronounced division of threats from a populist perspective.

Changes in Security Policies: The changes in security policies as a result of the rise of populism are numerous. One of the key changes is the increased focus on internal threats. Populist leaders often use rhetoric around internal threats to strengthen support and justify harsh security measures. This may include increased control over the media, intensified security policies for minority groups, and the pursuit of an agenda that often excludes international cooperation (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Similarly, the creation of external threats or an 'external enemy' that threatens peace is also emphasized. In this context, we agree with Marcuse (2006) that peace in society is secured by the constant presence of the threat of war.

Another change is the orientation of security policies towards the use of new technologies for surveillance and control. Advanced technologies and data analysis are used more intensively by populist governments to monitor and control citizens' activities. This change strengthens security controls but also raises concerns about privacy and individual rights (Baldwin, 1997).

New Trends: The rise of populism has brought several new trends in security policies. One trend is the focus on "internal security" as a primary priority over "external security." Populist leaders often use the fear of internal threats to justify their policies and reinforce populist support. This may include stricter border controls, targeting specific groups, and violating human rights in the name of security (Mudde, 2004). Another trend is the clear division of friends and enemies in security policy. Populism often uses the terminology of "internal" and "external enemies" to increase the sense of insecurity and justify harsher security policies. This simplified division helps create a unique sense of identity and solidarity within, but it can also lead to the exclusion and discrimination of other groups (Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

Risks and Opportunities: The impact of populism on security policies brings with it various risks and opportunities. One of the main risks is the intensification of tensions and conflicts within societies and at the international level. Security policies oriented by populism can lead to violations of citizens' rights and create a more repressive environment, where fear and insecurity are used to justify harsh actions (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). These policies can worsen international relations and increase international tensions due to a more divided and unilateral approach to security.

On the other hand, the rise of populism offers opportunities to refocus security policies to better address the concerns and needs of citizens. While these policies may be harsher and more oriented towards populist interests, they can also help identify and address internal issues that may have been neglected by traditional elites (Baldwin, 1997). This refocusing can help strengthen support for governments and improve crisis management at certain levels.

Thus, the impact of populism on traditional security policies is multidimensional and complex. The changes brought about by this phenomenon are evident and help shape security policies in a way that is sometimes oriented by fear and insecurity. The new trends, such as the focus on internal security and the clear division of friends and enemies, have various risks and opportunities that need to be carefully addressed to ensure effective and sustainable management of national and international security.

Populism and Security Policies in the Western Balkan Countries

Populism has gained significant importance in the politics of the Western Balkans over the past decade. This phenomenon, characterized by rhetoric that disparages elites and emphasizes the interests of "the people," has had a noticeable impact on security policies in this region. Countries such as Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina have been influenced by the rise of populism, which has led to significant changes in the way security policies are formulated and implemented. It is essential to highlight from the outset that there are two groupings with distinct differences among them. The Western Balkan countries (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia) that are NATO members have aligned their security policies with those of the Alliance, thereby limiting the influence of populism within the context of NATO. Their security strategies are harmonized with NATO's Strategic Concept. Similarly, in Kosovo, where external security is guaranteed by the Alliance through KFOR structures, the impact of populism is somewhat restricted. Conversely, populism has fewer constraints in countries that are not part of the Alliance. Populist leaders in Serbia and Bosnia frequently employ populist rhetoric whenever they feel the need to rally their electorate. Specifically:

Albania In Albania, the rise of populism has had a noticeable impact primarily on internal security policies. Populist leaders, whether in government or opposition, have used rhetoric around internal threats to strengthen political support. In this context, internal security policies are often driven by immediate political interests and may show an increased focus on controlling groups considered internal threats (Nutti, 2020). For instance, the government seeks to downplay and redirect attention away from issues like rising crime rates, drug trafficking, and corruption as internal security threats, while the opposition frequently exaggerates these threats as the country's primary risks. The government highlights the successes of the police, while the opposition emphasizes the failures in the fight against organized crime and corruption.

Kosovo In Kosovo, populism has similarly influenced security policies. Populist leaders, such as Albin Kurti, have used security rhetoric to justify their strong policies towards Serbia and to mobilize domestic support. The influence of populism on security policies is evident in the increased international tensions and the strengthening of Kosovo's positions in its dialogue with Serbia (Hajrullahu, 2021). Kosovo has adopted a more aggressive approach to security challenges, including strict measures against extremist groups and an intensified focus on security in the northern part of the country, where tensions are high. However, as mentioned earlier, while the effects of populism are evident in internal security policies, they remain limited and nearly under supervision concerning external security policies, as these are guaranteed by NATO and the European Union.

Serbia In Serbia, the impact of populism on security policies is evident through the nationalist rhetoric of President Aleksandar Vučić. His government has utilized populism to strengthen control and justify its hardline foreign and security policies. Security policies in Serbia have included increased surveillance measures and media control, as well as a strong stance against minority groups and political opposition (Stojanović, 2019). These policies are often driven by rhetoric that portrays Serbia as a victim of both external and internal threats, using this narrative to justify harsh measures and direct interventions.

North Macedonia In North Macedonia, populism has influenced security policies through an increased focus on ethnic divisions and differences. Populist leaders, such as Nikola Gruevski, have used populism in their security policies to strengthen their political positions and mobilize support from specific ethnic and national groups (Popovski, 2022). Security policies are often guided by rhetoric emphasizing threats from neighbors and other ethnic groups within the country, influencing how crises and tensions in North Macedonia are managed. In electoral campaigns, populism is used as a tool to attract both fanatic and moderate voters.

Montenegro In Montenegro, populism has had a significant impact on security policies, especially in the context of internal tensions and relations with Serbia. President Milo Đukanović has used populism to reinforce security policies aimed at maintaining stability and justifying actions against various groups considered threats to internal order (Milić, 2020). However, after the recent elections, populism helped the opposition come to power with a different approach. Now, Serbian and pro-Russian groups seem poised to influence both external and internal security policies. Security policies in Montenegro often involve strong measures against opposition groups and the use of populist rhetoric to stabilize the political position.

Bosnia and Herzegovina In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the impact of populism on security policies is closely tied to ethnic and political tensions. Populist leaders, such as Milorad Dodik, have used populism to mobilize support from different ethnic groups and justify their actions regarding security policies (Mihailović, 2021). Security policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina often involve ethnic divisions and an approach that emphasizes internal and external threats to the country's stability.

Trends and Risks: New trends in security policies in the Western Balkans include an increased focus on internal threats and intensified use of surveillance technologies. Security policies often follow an approach that emphasizes threats from within the country and uses populist rhetoric to justify harsh measures (Baldwin, 1997). These trends can lead to deteriorating international relations and increased tensions within societies. The risks include worsening human rights conditions and increased inter-ethnic tensions. Populist-oriented security policies often involve harsh and intrusive measures that can lead to violations of individual rights and freedoms (Mudde

& Kaltwasser, 2017). On the other hand, the opportunities include an increased focus on addressing internal concerns and greater mobilization of populist support, which can help stabilize crisis situations for a certain period.

In conclusion, the rise of populism in the Western Balkans has significantly influenced security policies in the region. The analysis of case studies in Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina shows that populism's impact has brought significant changes to security strategies, including an increased focus on internal threats and the use of harsh measures and surveillance technologies. These changes pose risks to human rights and international stability but also offer opportunities to address internal concerns and stabilize crisis situations for certain periods.

DISCUSSION

The study on the impact of populism on security policies in the Western Balkans has revealed several important findings that reflect the transformation of security policies and their connection to the theoretical framework. The rise of populism in this region has brought about a noticeable shift in how security policies are formulated and implemented, with a distinct focus on internal threats and a more aggressive use of security measures. The key findings indicate that security policies in Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina have been transformed to align with populist rhetoric that emphasizes internal threats and the need for strong security measures. These policies often include the use of surveillance technologies and an increased focus on ethnic and national divisions. The changes are evident in the strengthened control over groups considered as threats and in the heightened sensitivity to internal influences.

Connection to the Theoretical Framework

The findings of this study are consistent with the theoretical framework of populism and security. According to Mudde (2004), the theoretical framework of populism includes an ideology that divides society into two opposing groups: "the people" and "the elites." In this context, populist leaders often use rhetoric to create a clear division between these groups and to justify security policies that focus on internal threats. This approach is reflected in the security policies in the Western Balkans, where there has been an intensification of measures against minority groups and an increased use of technologies for surveillance and control.

Additionally, the theory of security, which emphasizes efforts to manage and minimize internal and external threats, is closely linked to the findings of this study. Security policies formulated under the influence of populism often include an approach that emphasizes internal threats and seeks to strengthen internal control to stabilize the situation (Baldwin, 1997). This approach is evident in the way security policies have developed in the Western Balkans, where populist leaders have influenced the increase in security measures against internal groups and the use of advanced technologies for surveillance.

Transformation of Security Policies

The transformation of security policies in the context of populism is evident in the increased use of strong measures and surveillance technologies. Security policies have increasingly focused on managing internal threats and using technologies to monitor and control citizens' activities. This aligns with the theory that emphasizes the use of force and increased control to maintain stability

and address internal threats (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). The transformation is also evident in the way policies have been influenced by populist rhetoric and the focus on ethnic and national divisions.

Consistency of New Policies

The new security policies, formulated under the influence of populism, are consistent with the general trends of populism and security theories. These policies often include a strong emphasis on internal threats and the use of strong measures to address these threats. Security policies in the Western Balkans are in line with theories that emphasize the use of strong controls and surveillance to manage crisis situations and maintain internal stability (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

In conclusion, the study's findings show that the rise of populism has significantly transformed security policies in the Western Balkans, with a marked shift towards stronger internal control and the use of advanced technologies for surveillance. These changes reflect the broader theoretical framework of populism and security, demonstrating the alignment of new security policies with populist rhetoric and the broader trends in the region.

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CONCLUSIONS

The study of the impact of populism on security policies in the Western Balkans has highlighted several key conclusions. The rise of populism in the region has significantly influenced the formation and implementation of security policies. These policies have undergone a noticeable transformation, with an increased focus on internal threats and the use of strong measures and surveillance technologies to maintain stability and control citizens' activities. The influence of populism has led to a rise in nationalist rhetoric and policies that mobilize political support by emphasizing internal threats while minimizing external ones.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the impact of populism and improve security policies in the Western Balkans, several important steps are necessary:

- **Review of Security Policies:** Security policies should be reviewed to ensure they are balanced and respect human rights. It is essential that policies not only focus on internal threats but also include aspects of international security and address various threats in a comprehensive manner.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Governments should enhance transparency and accountability in the formulation and implementation of security policies. This includes involving diverse actors and ensuring justice in decision-making processes to ensure that policies reflect general interests rather than just populist agendas.
- **Focus on Public Education and Information:** Promoting thorough education and accurate information regarding security policy and the impact of populism is crucial. This helps build an informed public and reduces the influence of populist rhetoric that can exacerbate internal tensions and divisions.

By following these recommendations, the Western Balkan countries can improve how they formulate and implement security policies, ensuring a more balanced and just approach that addresses the needs of all groups in society.

Summary

In summary, the findings of this study reflect a significant transformation of security policies in the Western Balkans as a result of the rise of populism. These changes align with the theoretical framework of populism and security theories, highlighting an increased focus on internal threats and the use of strong measures and surveillance technologies to maintain stability and manage threats. These policies contribute to understanding the impact of populism on security policies and shaping security strategies in a sensitive and complex context.

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