Is Populism Rising in New Zealand?

The new global political zeitgeist of radicalism and its impact on New Zealand politics

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Overview

• There’s clearly a more radical mood in politics throughout the world at the moment, with a variety of different types of new politics emerging to challenge the status quo.

• This talk looks at how the rise of these many different types of anti-establishment politics, especially populism, is reflected – or not – in New Zealand politics in 2017.
Background

- Studying politics for 27 years
- At the University of Otago for 10 years
- Now Victoria University of Wellington: The Institute of Governance and Policy Studies
- My orientation: “Critical politics”
- Political commentary and analysis
Outline

• Populism
• A new era of politics? A turning point?
• An interregnum: A decline of politics; a resurgence of politics
• The revival of an anti-establishment mood
• Global finance crisis and increased radicalism in politics
• New Zealand’s increasing materialist and postmaterialist politics
• The 2017 general election and beyond
Three key features of populism

1. Anti-Establishment
2. Authoritarian
3. Nativism
Populism

- The **Economic** factor – changes that have occurred in the economy, workforce and communities is fuelling discontent (globalisation)
- The **Cultural** factor – a backlash against the changing demographics, lifestyles, values, and socially liberal reforms
Populism? Or radicalism? New era?

- Populism is a very contested concept
- Many political phenomena is incorrectly equated with populism; also pejorative
- Other “radical” phenomena happening in politics recently: Corbyn; Sanders; Syriza; Podemos; Catalonia; nationalism; feminism; anti-racism; inequality; Trudeau; Macron
- Volatility
- Equates with a shift against the status quo; discontent; revolt; anti-establishment; anti-elites; fashionability of outsiders
- A new political era; a “new zeitgeist” and turning point
Global turning points

• ODT article earlier this year: “The turning points of politics”
• Four major turning points in politics over last 50 years:
  • **1967**: The birth of radical anti-establishment politics
  • **1989**: The victory of liberal democratic capitalism
  • **2001**: Terrorism and the "war on terror" escalates
  • **2016**: The revival of an anti-establishment mood
Proportion of estimated voting-age population who cast votes

- Proportion of estimated voting-age population who cast votes, 1984–2014
NZ party membership

- NZ’s membership decline has been greatest in OECD: from 24% (1950s) to 2% (1990s)
- Today - 3rd lowest ratio in OECD
A decline in trust

- 1966 survey on quality of MPs: 8% - ‘poor’; 46 - ‘good’ or ‘very good’; 46% - ‘satisfactory’
- 2005 NZVS on confidence in Parliament and political parties: 68.6% - had either ‘not very much confidence’ or ‘none at all’ in Parliament; 74.6% had little or no confidence in political parties
NZ political parties in decline?

- 2013 Transparency International Global Corruption Barometer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q6 (Figure 3)</th>
<th>Not at all corrupt</th>
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<th>Extremely corrupt</th>
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<tr>
<td>To what extent do you see the following categories to be affected by corruption?</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political parties</td>
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Figure 3: Perceptions of corruption, by institution

- Scale 1-5, where 1 means not at all corrupt, 5 means extremely corrupt.
“Who do we trust?” – NZ

- “Who do we trust?” - Colmar Brunton survey commission by VUW’s Institute of Governance and Policy Studies in 2016 about levels of political/social trust:

- 61% of NZers don’t have much trust in NZ govts to make decisions based on fairly considering citizens’ interests (69% for NZers earning under $30k)
- 52% of NZers don't trust govts to do what is right for NZ
- 49% of NZers don’t trust local MP to do what is right
- 55% of NZers trust government ministers less than 3 years ago
- 58% of NZers trust MPs less than 3 years ago
- 75% of NZers don’t have much trust in way political parties are funded
- Only 36% of Maori trust that the government will do what is right for NZ
NZ 2016 Edelman Trust Barometer

- 54% trust NGOs; 51% trust business; 41% trust government; 38% trust media
- 56% of New Zealand’s informed public have trust in New Zealand’s institutions compared to 44% of the mass population

Trust Rising Globally; But in NZ, Media Much Less Well Regarded

Percent trust in the four institutions of government, business, media and NGOs, 2015 vs. 2016
Confidence in earthquake recovery decision-making

- Canterbury Wellbeing Survey

Figure 1: Confidence in earthquake recovery decision-making (Canterbury Wellbeing Survey)
Satisfaction with opportunities to influence decisions

- Canterbury Wellbeing Survey

Figure 3: Satisfaction with opportunities to influence decisions (Canterbury Wellbeing Survey)
Are New Zealand's political leaders out of touch with the people?

- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Steady as it goes
Discontent

New Zealanders want a leader who will deliver:

- Radical change
- Gradual change
- Steady as it goes
When you consider NZ's system of government, which of the following is closest to the truth?

- 5,010: It's completely broken
- 12,493: It works well
- 21,710: It's working but needs to change...
Discontent

Our political leaders care about the things that people like me really value:
In general, New Zealand's political leaders:

- 6576
  - Keep their promises

- 22,312
  - Only sometimes keep their promises

- 9867
  - Usually break their promises
56% think politicians don't care

But over half of the country (56 per cent) say traditional parties and politicians don't care about people like them.

64% think the economy is rigged

And six in ten (64 per cent) of Kiwis agree that the economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful.
Six in ten also agree that New Zealand’s economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful (64%).

- Women are significantly more likely than men to agree (69% vs. 59%).
- Those who are unemployed are significantly more likely than average to agree (79% vs. 64% overall).
- Low income earners (household income less than $30,000) are significantly more likely than average to agree (77% vs. 64% overall).
- High income earners (household income over $100,000) are significantly more likely than average to disagree (21% vs. 13% overall).
Public concerns

Most Important Problem Facing New Zealand

- Economic Issues: 26.7%
- Housing/Homelessness Issues: 23.3%
- Social Issues: 17.9%
- Government/Public policy/Human rights: 13.0%
- Environmental Issues: 9.5%
- Health Issues: 2.0%
- War & Terrorism: 0%
Public concerns

Most Important Problems Facing New Zealand - Specific Issues

- Poverty/The gap between rich and poor: 14.0%
- House prices/Housing affordability: 13.7%
- Housing shortages/Homelessness: 9.6%
- Government/Politicians/Political unrest: 6.2%
- Immigration/Refugees: 5.5%
Long-term social and political change

- Demographic changes
- Neoliberalism of 1980s and 1990s
- Globalisation
- Technological change
- Changes in the way political parties and politicians operate (Decline of mass parties; professionalisation of politics)
- Politics as a career; development of a political class
A post-GFC revival of radicalism

- Why are populists and anti-Establishment ideas and politicians gaining ground?
- A post-GFC revival of radicalism, dissatisfaction, and anti-Establishment politics
- 2008- consensus undermined; a new radical phase
- Dissatisfaction with the status quo and elites
- Nascent radicalism of all types: Occupy; Syriza; Podemos; Corbyn, anti-immigration; Sanders; Trump; Brexit; feminism; ethnicity politics
- A challenge for democracy?
Theoretical arguments

- Resurgent post-GFC radicalism can be understood as having two main ideological bases: an increase in materialist and post-materialist ideological elements.

- The materialist aspect has taken the form of a re-emerging utilisation of class politics.

- The postmaterialist aspect has been found in an increasing propensity towards social issues and identity politics (or what is sometimes termed ‘recognition politics’, ‘social liberalism’ or ‘culture wars’).
New Zealand’s increasing materialist politics

• Materialist politics have historically underpinned New Zealand politics
• Materialist monopoly began to reduce in importance from the 1960s, with the growth of post-industrialist society
• Salience of postmaterialist politics has been increasing
• But temporary reversal of trend in 2000-2012 (especially during the resurgence of materialist-based politics following the GFC)
Public opinion about the most important issue facing New Zealand, 2001-15

Most important issue - annual average

- Economy
- Unemployment / Jobs
- Inequality/Poverty

Yearly percentages from 2001 to 2015:
- Economy: 5, 5, 6, 8, 5, 11, 13, 13, 4, 4, 14, 14, 22, 25, 33, 33, 26, 22, 20, 20, 23, 15, 21
- Unemployment / Jobs: 8, 10, 9, 11, 5, 5, 4, 4, 4, 4, 14, 13, 14, 13, 22, 22, 20, 15, 15, 12, 10
- Inequality/Poverty: 5, 5, 6, 8, 4, 4, 3, 4, 4, 4, 7, 11, 15, 15, 12, 10
Publication of articles in New Zealand publications mentioning ‘inequality’
Publication of articles in New Zealand publications mentioning ‘parliament’
Publication of articles in the New Zealand Herald mentioning “inequality”
Publication of articles in New Zealand publications mentioning ‘working class’
Number of articles in New Zealand publications mentioning ‘Marx’, ‘Marxism’ or ‘Marxist’
Number of articles in New Zealand publications mentioning ‘capitalism’
New Zealand’s increasing postmaterialist identity politics

- Postmaterialists of the new social movements of the 1970s
- Very strong influence on the Labour Party
- Social liberals were less interested in economics
- Identity politics domination declined during the 2000s and into the GFC
- Post-2012 revival of identity politics
Publication of articles in New Zealand publications mentioning ‘feminist’ or ‘feminism’

![Graph showing publication of articles mentioning 'feminist' or 'feminism'.](image-url)
Number of articles in New Zealand publications mentioning ‘gender’
Number of articles in New Zealand publications mentioning ‘racism’ or ‘racist’

![Graph showing the number of articles mentioning 'racism' or 'racist' over time.](image-url)
Number of articles in New Zealand publications mentioning ‘ethnicity’
Number of articles in New Zealand publications mentioning ‘political correctness’ or ‘politically correct’
Number of articles in New Zealand publications mentioning ‘identity politics’
Increased media use of “corruption”

Chart 1: Media database article mentions of "corrupt" or "corruption"
Media coverage correlated

Chart 3: Media database article mentions of "corrupt" or "corruption"
The 2014 general election

- The 2014 general election was especially rocky; but led to a no-change election
- The controversies were of a postmaterialist variety during a period when voters were very materialist-orientated
- Dirty Politics; Conservative Party; Internet Mana Party; state surveillance; gender politics
- The centre-right National Government campaigned hard on materialist issues; it’s slogan was ‘Working for New Zealand’; won 47%
- The centre-left Labour Party was widely associated instead with postmaterialist issues; won 25%
- Other minor parties were mostly postmaterialist in orientation: Greens: 11%; NZ First 9%; Conservatives 4%; Internet Mana 1%
No zeitgeist in 2017 election

- National got 46%
- Minor parties dwindled
- Possibly no change of government
- No “youthquake”
- No change in voter turnout
- No populist success
- Consensus: no populism or revolt occurred in 2017 in NZ
Zeitgeist in the 2017 election

- Centre-right lost ground (52% in 2014 dropped to 46%)
- Labour resurgent – 9% swing to the left
- “Jacindamania” expressed a desire for transformative change
- Labour campaign in Maori seats tapped into zeitgeist
Zeitgeist in the 2017 election

• The Greens initially tapped into the zeitgeist with their boldness on welfare
• TOP deliberately tapped into the radical zeitgeist
• Huge volatility in result; Labour surge; Greens fall; NZF decline; Maori Party loss
Zeitgeist in the 2017 election

- Volatility defined the campaign
- Renewed interest in politics
  - TV leaders debates
  - public meetings
Development of a “political class”

- Politicians’ backgrounds
- A less socio-economically diverse parliament
- Business backgrounds; professionals
- Increasing government backgrounds
- NP: 25% business; 19 govt
- LP: 21% govt; 18% business
- NZF: 28% business; 18% Education; 18% military/police
- Greens: 43% union/activism; 14% Govt; 29% business
The future

- The new era of politics is in flux
- NZ relatively less affected by GFC; only low levels of austerity; National Government responded to inequality concerns
- More discontent likely
- Let’s be positive about complaints about democracy and politics

I. Problems of democracy need to be addressed – therefore it’s good to have challenges
II. Radicalisation could be good for democracy