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## Housing and Populist Ecologies

Dr Richard Waldron, School of Natural and Built Environment, Queen's University Belfast

In the last decade, populist political parties and movements have become an increasingly salient electoral force globally. For example, European populist parties have trebled their vote shares since the early 2000s, while 25 percent of all Europeans voted for a populist candidate in 2018 (Lewis et al., 2018). While it remains a contested concept, populism is broadly understood as a style of politics that advances an anti-elitist discourse that supports the *common people* against existing *establishment* institutions and outsider groups, oftentimes immigrants and other minorities. In some countries, like Italy, populists have attained the reins of power, while in others, like the UK, they have transplanted their rhetoric and policy priorities into mainstream parties. Such transformations have sparked a major debate about the drivers of populist appeal. On one hand, literature emphasises the importance of cultural grievances, as voters express resentments toward globally mobile people, capital and culture, and the elites who benefit (Inglehart and Norris, 2016). On the other, economic factors related to wealth, labour, education and regional development have pushed voters toward populist alternatives (Rodrik, 2018). However, both perspectives broadly agree that populism represents the resentments of people concerned about potential futures in which they are economically and culturally irrelevant.

While the study of populism has largely been the preserve of political scientists, geographers have increasingly been concerned with spatial variations emanating from the Brexit referendum, the election of Donald Trump and the success of far-right parties in European elections. Such work has explored the compositional effects of populist voting (i.e. the distribution and characteristics of populist voters), as well as its contextual effects—that is, how differences in geographic contexts shape voters' political ideation and subjectivity. Indeed, political geographers have long argued that citizens' political views are not formed in isolation but are inflected by their everyday experiences of local economic and welfare conditions, social networks and the contexts in which they work, live, play and learn (Agnew and Shin, 2020). Because these social networks are inherently tied to space, this political socialization contributes to electoral geographies.

Menga (2021) elaborates on such intersections between populist politics and geographical space, advancing the concept of 'populist ecologies' to capture the tensions between environmental struggles and populist regimes of governance. Indeed, rising populist sentiment has increasingly been linked to environmental issues like resource extraction, hydro-politics and climate-change denial (Saguin, 2021, Isaacs, 2021). However, building on these contributions, this article considers an overlooked dimension of urban populist ecologies, though one that is the most important determinant of people's everyday wealth, welfare and environment: housing (Adler and Ansell, 2020).

Housing is the foundation of individual and societal wealth: it is key to the intergenerational transmission of wealth and is the basis for households' welfare and family planning. Housing and home directly influence people's welfare and social mobility, as well as their ontological security, identity construction and social relations. Housing markets are inherently spatial, and therefore political, dividing neighbourhoods, cities and regions along demographic, class and income lines. Housing markets influence the distribution of winners and losers across capitalist economies. Wealthier, desirable locations in global cities like Paris and New York have witnessed exceptional house price appreciation, while housing markets in smaller cities and towns are often less dynamic and face significant insecurity in the face of economic volatility (McCann, 2018). Some homeowners gain from house price appreciation, which provides security against future economic shocks, while others face

deeper housing busts and exclusion from wealth gains. Such conditions create an 'us versus them' intergroup rivalry involving poor and middle-class households that form the base of support for populist movements (Rossi, 2018). Indeed, the erosion of middle-class prosperity through declining wages, economic stagnation and the financial stress of suburban, mortgaged homeownership have been linked to higher levels of right populist support (Kiss et al., 2020).

Elsewhere, I have proposed the concept of 'housing discontent' to capture how experiences of housing and place-quality conditions, as well as issues regarding housing affordability, security and accessibility, shape political grievances at the local, neighbourhood scale (Waldron, 2021). Such an approach would analyse how place-based hardships and housing inequalities shape a growing acceptance of populist political rhetoric, values and policies, examining a heterogeneity of issues overlooked in existing research. For example, one might explore new generational fractures within rental markets and how young renters' experiences of housing unaffordability and insecurity might influence their political attitudes towards welfare, redistribution and the role of the State in the housing market. Others might focus on the precarities of low-income homeowners in economically declining regions, and how perceptions of diminished social status, housing wealth exclusion, financial stress and community change might influence protest voting. Others might examine how the ethnic and economic composition of disadvantaged neighbourhoods might prompt competition for social resources between 'natives' and migrant communities (Rodrik, 2018). Such an approach would not only integrate diverse literatures regarding housing studies, urban political economy and political geography, but would also provide a rich set of empirical instances to learn about the political importance of housing, home and place.

Indeed, emergent research suggests that such relationships exist between housing dynamics and populist voting. In the first study of its kind, Adler and Ansell (2020) found that regional and local house price variations were a robust predictor of right-wing populist voting sentiment in the UK's Brexit Referendum and the 2017 French Presidential election. In both contexts, regions and wards with lower house price values and slower house price growth were significantly more likely to display support for the Leave Vote and Marianne Le Pen, even after controlling for other factors like income, employment and education. Indeed, in the case of Brexit, low-value housing markets (c. £135,000) had a 60 percent probability of supporting Brexit, while those in high value markets (c. £400,000) displayed just a 25 percent probability. The findings demonstrate how housing, as the largest driver of contemporary wealth inequalities, feeds political disaffection at the local level. As people become locked into a declining housing market, it may amplify 'geotropic concerns' regarding the perceived status of their local community and their sense of exclusion from a housing-wealth boom. Such distributional conflicts are the fodder that right-wing populists feed on.

Economic or cultural crises often act as windows of opportunity for populists to mobilize citizens' political discontent. Right-wing populists often identify international elites and immigrants as the culprits for unskilled workers' precarity. However, such scapegoating extends beyond the labour market into the housing sector, particularly where low-income tenants perceive themselves to be in competition with migrants for scarce housing, or where distributional conflicts exist between migrants and 'taxpaying natives' over access to public housing and other social resources. Both Hooijer (2020) and Essletzbicher and Forcher (2021) have identified tensions in social housing access in the cases of the Netherlands and Vienna, noting how such perceived grievances can result in heightened support for anti-immigrant parties. Such effects are particularly strong among lower-income households in locations where voters have few housing alternatives and in ethnically homogenous enclaves within larger diversifying cities. This work also demonstrates the contextual importance of the neighbourhood, detailing how precarious local economic conditions, lower education levels and patterns of demographic change may prompt greater support for right populist movements.

However, it is not only right-wing populists who capitalize on such concerns. Arguably, it is the more progressive, left-populist movements that have gained most traction from such issues. For example, the highly successful left-wing party Barcelona en Comú evolved out of that city's anti-

eviction protest movement, and since 2015, it has led a municipal government based on a radical policy agenda around housing rights, anti-corruption and direct democratic participation. In Ireland, Sinn Féin has emerged as the largest opposition party in that country and has made significant electoral gains on housing issues, particularly among young, urban voters who are attracted to proposals for a national rent freeze and a large public housing programme (Waldron, 2021). The recent success of the Deutsche Wohnen & Einteigen referendum in Berlin, which seeks to expropriate 240,000 housing units from corporate landlords, demonstrates how a progressive grassroots movement might frame those responsible for housing crises as opponents of 'the people,' thereby constructing a group identity for their supporters set against an oligarchic elite.

These cases demonstrate that new approaches are required to understand the interplay between the experience of housing and place-based inequalities and rising support for populist politics. Housing is increasingly integrated within global capital flows, household wealth strategies and spatial dynamics of uneven development. These spatial processes are driving social polarisation between the haves and have nots, as housing markets widen the gulf between booming, cosmopolitan cities and weaker regions struggling with deindustrialisation and population decline. As voters in these locations perceive themselves to be excluded from housing-wealth effects, this shapes resentments toward a political mainstream that has presided over such disparities. As such effects are likely to continue, future research must focus on these evolving dynamics and empirically determine the connections between housing conditions, socio-spatial inequality and new forms of political conflict.

In summary, this viewpoint calls for a more geographically informed analysis of populism— one that takes seriously the material and symbolic grievances that are attached to housing and place and how these are mobilized by populist political actors. There is much work to be done on examining the identities of those living in left-behind places, the motivations of left- and right-wing populist electorates and the tactics and rhetorical strategies that populists use to leverage the emotion of place to advance their political agendas. Geographers are best placed to address such challenges; particularly how long-term patterns of localized economic inequalities shape political behaviour and the specifically territorial dimensions of populist cultural politics. A more complete understanding of the role of the global financial crisis, the accompanying decade of austerity, and the ways that the crisis has shaped the geography of the populist surge is required. Geographers must elaborate on the policy responses to address the impacts of economic and cultural challenges associated with the rise of populist support, such as policies to mitigate differences in economic performance, disparities in educational and regional investment, and population decline. Such a programme of work is urgently required to better understand the connections between socio-spatial inequalities and the growth of populist ecologies.

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