



Emerging patterns of right-wing international populism in Central Eastern Europe and Latin America: let's fight the globalists!

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Abstract

This article examines the emerging patterns of right-wing international populism through a comparative regional analysis of populist alliances in Central Eastern Europe and Latin America. It argues that the fight against ‘globalists’ constitutes a central organizing principle of right-wing populist cooperation beyond the nation-state. The article addresses two research questions: How is right-wing international populism implemented at the regional level? and How do right-wing populists use ‘globalists’ as an empty signifier to construct ‘international elites’? To answer the research questions, this study applies a comparative case study analysis. Emerging right-wing international populism in Central Eastern Europe (Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Czechia) and in Latin America (Brazil, Argentina, and El Salvador) are examined to explore the rhetorical tools, the substance of right-wing international populism in both regions and the constraints on deeper cooperation. The findings show that sustained populist rhetoric and polarizing identity constructions facilitate convergence around anti-globalist positions across regions. At the same time, variation in tone, style, and issue emphasis—ranging from relatively moderate to overtly confrontational—broadens the scope of cooperation while simultaneously constraining its institutional depth and durability.

Keywords International populism · Right-wing populism · Anti-globalism · International elite

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Introduction

The global rise of populism has a number of international implications. From an international relations perspective, the proliferation of various forms of cross-border populism, i. e. alliances and cooperation among populist actors (De Cleen, 2017), who are often nationalist, is highly relevant. These alliances manifest themselves in various forms, including the formation of highly publicised alliances, mutual assistance and support, exchange of experiences, joint proposals, joint voting, and so forth. This growing network of populist alliances (Wojczewski, 2024) has the potential to significantly influence the global landscape, reinforcing the populist agenda, impacting established interstate relations and shape international institutions, a phenomenon that has been exacerbated by the re-election of Donald Trump.

The majority of IR research on populism employs a country-based approach to explore the characteristics of populist foreign policy in Western Europe (De Cleen et al., 2020; Giurlando, 2021; Lochocki, 2018), East Central Europe (Csehi & Zgut, 2021; Havlík, 2016; Varga & Buzogány, 2021), Latin America (Casarões & Barros Leal Farias, 2021; Sagarzazu & Thies, 2019; Wehner & Thies, 2021), North America (Biegon, 2019; Wojczewski, 2020; Hall, 2021), the Middle East (Kaliber & Kaliber, 2019; Olivas Osuna & Burton, 2024; Özpek & Yaşar, 2020; Wajner, et al., 2023) and Asia (Destradi & Plagemann, 2019; Song & Velasco, 2024; Wicaksana & Wardhana, 2021).

Nevertheless, in order to achieve a more profound comprehension of the manner in which populism impacts interstate relations and shapes the international order itself, it is imperative to analyse its international implications *at the international level*, too. As Miller-Idriss (2019) notes ‘When we only examine populist nationalism through the lens of the nation-state, we miss the many ways in which populist groups who are pursuing nationalist goals draw on a shared set of rhetorical tactics and cognitive schemata’. Complementing the description of populism as a domestic phenomenon that shapes foreign policy, it is essential to consider populism as a global phenomenon; examining the visibly broadening cross-border populist links and the interplay between national and international populism.

The study of international populism is still in its infancy, given that it is a relatively novel phenomenon and the concept has been recently introduced. The existing literature has primarily focused on the differences between international and transnational populism (De Cleen, 2017; Moffitt, 2017; Wojczewski, 2023), while the most extensively researched cases of international populism are cooperation among European populist parties (McDonnell & Werner, 2020; Wojczewski, 2023; Heft Pfetsch et al., 2023) and among Latin American left-wing populist governments (De la Torre, 2017; Wajner & Roniger, 2022; Wajner & Wehner, 2023). These sources seek to explore the motives and methods of cooperation among populist actors, and to understand the construction of the ‘international people’ and ‘international elite’.

‘Populism (...) has not only become globalized, internationalized and transnationalized, but also increasingly regionalized’ (Wajner, 2025). In this article,



I focus on how right-wing populists cooperate on a regional basis and how they approach globalisation and the globalists when establishing cross-border ties. As a continuation of their domestic rhetoric and action, right-wing populists typically target 'globalists' in the international arena and build alliances to challenge the institutions and structures established by the 'international elite' after WWII. The aim of this research is to explore regional cooperation among right-wing populists, and to understand how globalists are used as 'empty signifiers' in this context. My research questions are as follows: How is right-wing international populism implemented at a regional level? How do right-wing populists use 'globalists' as an empty signifier to construct 'international elites'?

I have elected to adopt a comparative case study approach. This will facilitate the illustration of the right-wing political demands that serve as the basis of international populist identity construction around which populist cooperations are typically built. The methodology also supports the highlighting of how international populism adapts to regional contexts and the identification of the similarities and differences experienced regarding the anti-globalist sentiments it builds on.

Countries belonging to the same region have typically shared demands and objectives, consequently domestic populist demands are often easily elevated to the regional level. Furthermore, the existence of regional cooperation among populists is a well-established layer of international populism. Consequently, a regional perspective is beneficial for analysis. The selection of cases is based on the following criteria. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe, being young democracies, have witnessed the rise of populism as a pervasive phenomenon. The Visegrad countries constitute a distinct subgroup within the European Union, characterised by experiences of democratic setbacks and Eurosceptic populism. The emergence of right-wing populism in this region and cooperation among populists has presented a significant challenge to the functioning of the EU, compelling it to formulate a response. The focus is on the Visegrad countries, because in CEE it has been an important actor with regards to international populism since 2015 and it has provided essential lessons since then. The Latin American region has experienced a century-long history of populist movements. Recent events have seen a marked increase in the presence of right-wing populist figures, leading to a strengthening of international activism. I selected Brazil and Argentina as the two biggest South American countries, while Bolsonaro and Milei are charismatic leaders with considerable international outreach. Nayib Bukele represents a small Central American country, but he also shares an anti-globalist agenda. The selection of the right-wing populist leaders of V4 in CEE and Bolsonaro, Milei and Bukele in Latin America was made on the basis of these leaders having (or having had) a 'global fame' (Winter, 2026), strong visibility and active international presence.

In both case studies, two aspects are examined in order to facilitate a comparison of the regional practices of right-wing international populism. Firstly, the focus is on mutual endorsement at the rhetorical level, typically observed in the context of political campaigns. Secondly, the various structures of international populism are examined to explore the elements of a regional 'populist playbook'. Discursive evidence has been collected from the past decade, with the aim of analysing speeches and statements made by the relevant actors. These are to be examined in order to



identify any specific references to the globalist-anti-globalist divide or prospects for regional cooperation. This aspect underscores the policy ramifications of international populism, explaining how rhetorical components are (or are not) incorporated into political actions. Furthermore, an analysis of the various structures of right-wing populism reveals the increasing number of actors involved, and demonstrates how these structures complement each other.

Exploring every single interaction between right-wing populists in Central Eastern Europe and Latin America is beyond the scope of this article. My more modest aim is to present the various structures of right-wing international populism on a regional basis and to explain how they articulate the 'international elite' based on anti-globalism while highlighting the inconsistencies of these structures.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. The following section presents a conceptual framework, exploring the links between populism, international populism, regionalism and anti-globalism on theoretical grounds. Subsequently, regional case studies on Central Eastern Europe and the Latin America are presented on a comparative basis.

International populism and anti-globalism: a conceptual framework

Populism, international populism and populist legitimization strategies

Populism is a highly contested concept, primarily due to the diversity of populisms in practice and its 'chameleonic nature' (Heiskanen, 2021; Muis, 2015). It is quite challenging to make any statement with regards to populism that are valid and relevant in case of each populist actors. In this article, I use Mudde's frequently cited definition, which posits that populism is a "thin-centered ideology" that considers society to be divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps: "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite." According to this view, populism argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people (Mudde, 2004). While the concept of 'the people' was initially defined at the national level, the threats of globalization, the global rise of populism and the intensifying foreign policy of populist actors have led to the 'internationalisation' of both the 'people' and the 'elite' (De Cleen, 2019). The populist political and socio-cultural demands have attracted various populist actors from different countries to unite, thereby broadening the concept of the people versus the elite.

These developments have given rise to new forms of populism, that are not nationally defined, but rather extend beyond national borders to target populations across multiple nations. Existing literature distinguishes between international populism and transnational populism, while Wojczewski describes them as 'cross-border populism' (2024). Both result from the rising number and international activity of populists in the world. International populism rests on the ambitions of political actors and their decisions to forge closer ties with other political actors. In contrast, transnational populism is more grass-root in nature, and it aims to create a truly transnational community of people. International populism is defined as 'international ties between populist actors who are concerned with



representing firmly nation-based conceptions of “the people” (Moffitt, 2017). This is a coalition among peoples in different nation-states (Kuyper & Moffitt, 2020), an international cooperation between nationally organised populist parties and movements (De Cleen, 2017) ‘without claiming to represent ‘the people’ of those other states’ (Kuyper & Moffitt, 2020).

In contrast, transnational populism is about the construction of truly transnational people, people beyond the borders of a single nation-state in the singular (De Cleen, 2017; Kuyper & Moffitt, 2020). Consequently, the distinction between the two is a matter of degree: while international populism brings ‘together nationally organised political actors and nationally defined people-as-underdogs’, transnational populism creates a ‘transnational people-as-underdog’ (De Cleen, 2017).

In practice, international populism complements the nationally defined ‘us’—e. g. Americans, Hungarians or Argentinians—by further layers of self-definition, internationalizing the content of the ‘people’. Most typically, the constructed international people is ‘a coalition of nationally bounded peoples-as-underdog who share similar concerns or a shared enemy’ (Moffitt, 2017). Regional belonging is a significant factor in the formation of populist self-identity (when the ‘people’ are we, Central Europeans or Latin Americans). As Wajner (2025) explains, ‘to extend the people-versus-elites divide beyond national boundaries, populists reproduce transnational imaginaries, identities, and narratives often rooted in regional contexts’. Internally, ethno-national, cultural and religious ties (Yilmaz & Morieson, 2023) are typically essential for right-wing populists as grounds of constructing the ‘people’. Consequently it is not surprising that regional links often matter when articulating the ‘international elite’. Externally, populists in the same region define similar or overlapping actors as the ‘elite’, especially in semi-periphery regions such as Central Eastern Europe and Latin America. The phenomenon of regional hegemony, who exercise significant influence over the developmental trajectories and the political and economic prospects of regional actors, frequently serves as a focal point for populist discourse. As Wajner (2025) emphasizes, in Latin America ‘regional integration has become such a critical battleground between ‘the people’ and ‘the elites’ in the latest wave of populism’.

The question of whether populists undermine or reinforce regionalism remains a subject of debate. As several authors have noted, populists perceive regional institutions and, by extension, international organisations as being established by the ‘elites’. These institutions are regarded as liberal in nature and damaging to state sovereignty. Consequently, populists are opposed to regional integration (Chrysosgelos, 2017; Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017; Wajner, 2021). Pacciardi et al. (2024) introduce the various instruments (such as criticisms, vetoes, obstruction, withdrawal, etc.) with which populists undermine these platforms. In response, other scholars have highlighted instances in which populist foreign policy aligns with regional cooperation or populists establish alternative regional platforms (Söderbaum et al., 2021) for enhanced cooperation. Populists in power tend to utilise regional institutions to consolidate (semi-)peripheral unity (Copelovitch & Pevehouse, 2019; Destradi & Plagemann, 2019; Wojczewski, 2023) and raise their bargaining power in the international arena when confronting the ‘elites’.



De Cleen (2017) describes international populism as a sort of meta-populism, meaning that in case of international collaboration among populists, ‘A populist chain of equivalence between populisms is constructed: different populisms with their specificities are brought together through the opposition to common international, transnational or foreign elites (and to similar national elites)’. At the regional level, beyond geographical closeness, such collaboration is typically eased by shared historical experiences, similar positions in international and/or regional organisations and similarly perceived regional ‘threats’ of globalism.

Wojczewski distinguishes four motives behind inter- and transnational populism: policy (e.g. decreasing migration), legitimacy (e.g. reinforcing the legitimacy of political demands and status), seeking votes in international institutions (e.g. increasing vote share and creating vote blocs), and learning (e.g. exchanging experiences) (2023). These ambitions are interconnected, but legitimisation outstands as a core objective of populists here. A Wajner (2022) notes, ‘populism itself can be understood as a *macro-strategy of legitimisation*’.

Why do populists seek legitimacy in the international arena? Originally, legitimate rule was distinguished from repressive rule, thus occupying a central role in the theoretical framework of democracy. The assertion is that ‘legitimate rule was supposed to be free of arbitrariness and despotism’ (Tannenberg et al., 2021). While populism is not inherently authoritarian, in practice the systems of rule that contemporary populist parties and figures in power tend to favour are highly centralised/authoritarian (Stanko, 2025). Dynamic legitimisation theory (Del Sordi & Dalmaso, 2018) posits that authoritarian leaders prioritise international status recognition as a means of reinforcing the internal legitimacy of their regime. In their speeches, populists typically refer to their own popular legitimacy, while their opponents typically attempt to undermine their rule by delegitimizing their election, their policies and their governance. As Wajner (2022) asserts, populists ‘are particularly affected by struggles over legitimisation’.

Populists in power, even if they were elected democratically, are typically criticized for democratic setbacks and authoritarian actions by domestic opposition and also by international actors, including international organisations or human rights groups. I argue that for populists, legitimisation strategies serve dual, internal and external, objectives. Internally, they seek to demonstrate that criticisms of democratic setbacks are politically-driven attacks, with international populism primarily targeting the maintenance of domestic support. The extension of the definition of ‘people’ to encompass actors beyond national borders has the potential to reinforce the belief of domestic supporters that their values and demands are shared by actors in other regions. This dynamic, in turn, has the potential to validate and render relevant the struggle being waged at home in the broader region.

Externally, populists seek legitimacy at the international level to be able in order to shape the norms, principles and regulations of international organisations and the Liberal International Order (LIO) that rest on the ideas of the previous elite. As Friedrichs (2022) observes, populists do not overtly and directly challenge the Liberal International Order (LIO), rather, they criticize it along certain topics, like human rights or disarmament. Being united as representatives of nationally-defined ‘people’, populists can reinforce their bargaining power in the international arena.



They do so in a number of ways, including by justifying the weakening of democratic institutions and the centralisation of power. They also justify the undermining the rights of ‘the others’, like capitalists and imperialists (left-wing populism) or migrants, refugees, sexual minorities (right-wing populism). Populists contest the prevailing legitimacy of the LIO as an elite-driven project serving the interests of minorities while excluding the ‘silent majority’.

Altogether, legitimization establishes a nexus between the structures of both national and international populism. The latter serves as a tool to reinforce domestic power, while cooperating with like-minded populists at the regional level reinforces the global influence of populists. The following section explains, how anti-globalism drives contemporary populist messages.

Right-wing populist approach to globalization and globalism

As various authors highlight, accelerating globalization and its intensifying impacts have contributed to the recent wave of populism (Chrysosgelos, 2017; Rodrik, 2021; Stiglitz, 2017). However, globalization is not a new topic for populists. Irrespective of their ‘thick’ ideology, populists typically construct the national and international ‘elite’ based on the assumption that the ‘elite’ is responsible for and benefits from globalization. Classical populists in Latin America (1930s-1960s) emerged from the Great Depression, scapegoated the United States and imperialism for their economic underdevelopment and inequality, while held anti-immigrant views to protect domestic workers. During the 1990s, far-right populists in Europe frequently associated globalisation with the United States, perceiving Americanisation as a cultural threat. These populists also shared anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant sentiments. During the 2000s, South American pink tide populists also identified globalization with the US, complemented by the IMF-imposed neoliberal reforms. They typically campaigned with promises to support the poor and marginalized who paid the social price of globalization. It is evident that, in general, populists have historically been responsive to economic insecurity and cultural backlash resulting from globalisation (Bajo-Rubio & Yan, 2019).

These ‘traditions’ of anti-globalization sentiments persist in contemporary populism. As Michelsen et al. (2025) argue,

‘Today a complex assemblage of nationalists, autocrats, theocrats and populists across the world oppose Liberal Internationalism, or ‘Globalism’ as they name it, but they do not seek to destroy internationalism. Rather, they seek to create a new reactionary international society in their own image, orientated by suspicion of universalist and progressive philosophies that sought to jettison birth-cultural tradition via the discourse of modernisation.’

It means that they do not oppose internationalism, but they aim to create a ‘new international society in their own image’ (Michelsen et al., 2025). There appears to emerge a shift from a predominantly negative connotation to a growing sentiment of anti-globalism. Keohane and Nye (2000) elucidate the distinction between globalization and globalism as follows:



‘Globalism is a state of the world involving networks of interdependence at multicontinental distances. The linkages occur through flows and influences of capital and goods, information and ideas, and people and forces, as well as environmentally and biologically relevant substances (such as acid rain or pathogens). Globalization and deglobalization refer to the increase or decline of globalism.’

The growing and more visible presence of multinational network of interdependence results in an ‘increase of globalism’, which is believed to entail consequences such as the loss of state sovereignty and Westernization (Kochtcheeva, 2020). Globalism is strongly associated with the Liberal International Order (LIO), being described as a pillar of LIO along with democratic governance, free trade and international institutions (Hirsh, 2019). The populist logic aligns with the division of the world into two distinct camps: globalists, who regard the growth of cross-border networks and dependencies as both natural and beneficial, and anti-globalists, who strive to halt the rise of globalism, while disregarding the intricacies of its multifaceted impacts on diverse regions, sectors, and social groups. Anti-globalists offer ‘simpler and more radical responses to the complex challenges of globalisation, which resonated with the feelings of frustration and uncertainty of many voters’ (Dudar, 2024).

The simplification of the decision between globalism and anti-globalism has the potential to engender stronger international populism, whilst also impeding political and social discourse with regard to more sophisticated policy responses to halt negative consequences. However, it is important to emphasise that, as posited by Gautam (2021) ‘anti-globalism should not be seen as a complete denial of globalisation, but rather as a demand for its reform and humanisation’. This suggests that anti-globalist populists do not necessarily aspire to isolation or de-globalisation; rather, they seek to influence political, economic and social global integration (Dudar, 2024).

But who are the globalists and what is the globalist/anti-globalist divide about? Cadwallader defines the ‘globalist ethos’ as

‘Believing that one’s primary definition of oneself as a human being involves two things: viewing oneself as a part of a global community in which every human being truly has equal worth, and pledging one’s overriding loyalty to the global community whose foremost common goal is the long-term survival of the human species on the planet Earth’ ... ‘The core value-ideals of the globalist ethos are respect for interconnectedness, pluralism, quality of human life (in both the spiritual and material senses), and personal responsibility for the whole earth’ (1994).

She suggests that accepting or rejecting the globalist ethos would be the 21st century’s most essential value issue: ‘Eventually this will become the chief valuational conflict not only in the West but in the whole world’ (Caldwallader, 1994). The initial conflict between globalists and anti-globalists was primarily concerned with environmental and ecological issues. However, it subsequently evolved into a broader conflict between those who are forward-thinking and those who are backward-looking (Caldwallader, 1994), with regards to political



and socio-cultural matters. In this sense, forward-looking globalists seek to adapt to the reality of globalization and to progress towards the universal recognition of the necessity to respect the diversity of humankind and societies. Backward-glancing anti-globalists struggle to keep nation-states as the primary political units and protect traditional families as the primary social units.

Contemporary right-wing populism serves to reinforce the deepening globalist/anti-globalist divide. The electoral success of populist leaders in domestic contexts is frequently attributed to their anti-globalist stance, which is purported to erode the political and economic dominance of the 'elite'. Nevertheless, anti-globalism also offers common grounds for cooperation at the international level, through the construction of a 'globalist international elite'. This elite is identified with various actors in the international arena, at the state- and non-state level alike. In this case, the term 'globalists' functions as an empty signifier, that allows populist actors to designate a broad and flexible 'international other', encompassing political, economic, and cultural elites perceived as threatening national sovereignty.

Altogether, globalists are described by populists as 'anti-national traitors who put the interests of foreigners ... over the interests and well-being of their nations' (Wojczewski, 2023) and this is essential in the context of the interplay between national and international populism. At the national level, globalist elites are against the peoples' interests, because they are strongly connected to or even dictated/financed by the 'international elite', that works against the 'people' in the political, social and cultural issues mentioned above (sovereignty, global governance, cultural homogeneity and conservative social values). This approach pushes populists towards other populists in the international arena who also fight the globalist elite in their domestic domains. These mechanisms inherently engender inconsistencies in the realm of international populism, given that the elites, defined on a national basis, harbour divergent perspectives on globalism, while the designation of 'foreigners' is dependent on the historical-regional attributes and power relations of the actors in question. Beyond that, right-wing populists seek to unite disparate groups at the national and international levels, fostering the formation of antagonistic, homogeneous blocs. However, while a clear distinction exists between the government and opposition at the domestic level, the anti-globalist coalition at the international level is less coherent, more fragmented along thematic lines.

According to Wojczewski (2024), the populist radical right's 'discourses mobilize an entrenched far-right conspiracy theory that narrates globalisation and related phenomena such as deindustrialisation, migration, multiculturalism or global governance as a hideous plot by a small group of 'globalists'. The European Union, the United Nations and other international institutions are typically described as the most essential international fora led by a highly-educated 'globalist elite' who work for rising cross-border interconnections and reinforce globalism in terms of undermining state sovereignty, institutionalizing global governance, undermining cultural homogeneity and conservative social values.



Right-wing international populism in Central Eastern Europe

Legitimation through rhetoric support

It is evident that, after assuming power in 2010, the Hungarian government played a pivotal role in supporting populist campaigns across Central and Eastern Europe. Firstly, the Orbán government had been in power for more than a decade, which enabled it to accumulate significant financial resources that could be used to provide tangible support rather than merely rhetoric. Secondly, the government's legitimacy was further reinforced by its repeated electoral success (2010, 2014, 2018, 2022) and served as a model for like-minded populists in the region.

The FIDESZ government in Hungary had well-established links with the PiS (Law and Justice party) in Poland. Orbán's support for the Polish election in 2019 was marked by his emphasis on the significance of excellent Hungarian-Polish bilateral relations. In contrast, the Hungarian involvement in 2023 was characterised by a greater degree of direct engagement. Notwithstanding the discord surrounding the Ukraine war (see below), Jarosław Kaczyński utilised Orbán's advisors in its campaign to discredit the opposition leader, Donald Tusk (Telex, 2023). As stated in *Tygodnik Powszechny* (2023), the Hungarian government financed anti-immigrant videos broadcasted to the Polish audience on YouTube to illustrate the success of Hungarian border policies. Despite the electoral defeat of the PiS, Orbán persisted in his support for the party in its ongoing opposition to the Tusk government.

Notwithstanding the antecedent hostilities and ideological disparities, the 2023 electoral campaign of Robert Fico in Slovakia was similarly supported by online advertisements that emphasised the imperative of safeguarding Europe from illegal migration (Telex, 2024). The return of Fico was met with a favourable response from the Hungarian government; Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó stated: 'Robert Fico also thinks about war, migration, and gender in the same way as we do. His victory offers a strong chance to strengthen the V4 alliance' (Insight Hungary, 2023).

In 2025, Orbán endorsed Karol Nawrocki (a candidate supported by the PiS in the 2025 Polish presidential election) and also Andrej Babiš at CPAC Hungary. He advocated for a 'patriotic plan' to transform the European Union declaring 'We want to take Europe back from migrants. We want a Christian culture, schools based on national principles' (Polskiego Radia, 2025). In reference to Nawrocki Orbán stated 'If you want to know what true liberal democracy looks like, ask him. Unheard-of things are happening in Poland. All European rules and principles are being trampled. And Brussels supports it' (Notes from Poland, 2025), suggesting that the stance adopted by Brussels in favour of this initiative is indicative of a political motivation on the part of the EU to criticise the PiS and to defend the Tusk government, despite the democratic will of the Polish people being expressed.

Orbán greeted Babiš at 2025 CPAC Hungary as follows (Magyar Nemzet, 2025):

'Dear Andrej, what battles we fought together for years, battles lasting long into the night in Brussels! We had to stand against a majority of pro-migration prime ministers. Today, Hungary is a migrant-free zone. That couldn't have happened without you. Thank you—and we're awaiting your return!'



Based on these statements, Orbán highly supported right-wing populists in Visegrad countries to re-build a Central European anti-migration alliance within the EU in the name of state-sovereignty, undermining globalist Brussels. Another essential goal was to legitimize the democratic setbacks that occurred in these countries (especially in Poland and Hungary) under populist rule. Populist electoral success serves to legitimize populist rule, thereby substantiating the assertion that these leaders are acting in accordance with the will of the populace.

Regional cooperation against the globalists: Visegrad Group, Euroscepticism and CPAC

In the context of Central Eastern Europe, right-wing international populism is characterised by three distinct structures. Firstly, the Visegrad Group was in existence prior to the rise of right-wing populism in the region; however, it subsequently functioned as a useful framework of regional populism after 2015. Secondly, the rise of Euroscepticism, the emergence of joint proposals and the use of vetoes in the EU have recently contributed to the manifestation of a distinct layer of Central European populism. Thirdly, at the non-state level, the multiplication of CPAC regional events functioned as a platform for the sharing and reinforcement of conservative social values.

(B1) The Syrian refugee crisis in 2015 was an important reason for the rise of anti-globalist populism. The Visegrad Group emerged as a ‘face’ of these developments, although not all Visegrad leaders were right-wing populists at that time (social-democrat Bohuslav Sobotka was in power in Czechia) and refugees targeted these countries as places for transition instead of settlement.

The joint anti-immigrant stance on behalf of V4 is well documented (Frelak, 2017; Csanyi, 2020; Kajánek, 2022) and led to the Visegrad Group being described as a ‘toxic brand’ (Fawn., 2018; Kaniok et al., 2022) that threatened the unity of the EU. In September 2016 the Visegrad leaders jointly proposed the idea of ‘flexible solidarity’ at the European Council in Bratislava. It meant that ‘the distribution of refugees would be purely voluntary, allowing Member States to refrain from receiving any additional refugees and contributing financial support and expertise instead’ (Zaun, 2018). This contrasted the idea of the refugee quota system presented by the core members relying on international solidarity and EU-level response of the refugee crisis instead of national solutions. In this case, ‘globalism’ was seen as a threat to cultural homogeneity and the Christian identity of Europe, as Orbán argued: ‘the future belongs to Central Europe’ as a region without migrants contrasting ‘mixed societies with a growing Muslim population’ in Western Europe (About Hungary, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c).

(B2) The non-Westphalian features of the European institutions offer an easy target for populist anti-globalist demands, consequently Euroscepticism serves as a solid base of international populism. Euroscepticists are not necessarily populist, while populists are not necessarily Euroscepticists, but populist parties in Europe—especially right-wing parties—‘are often Eurosceptic’ (Reiser & Hebenstreit, 2020). Kneuer (2019) writes about populism and Euroscepticism as ‘two different



concepts with growing overlapping'. He identifies two significant intersections between them: populists have capitalised on the opportunity to challenge the European integration consensus in member-state societies, while populists and Euroscepticists are both typically anti-elitist.

These intersections provide the foundation for Eurosceptic international populism among member-states regardless their geographical background. However, a layer of Eurosceptic populism has emerged in Central and Eastern Europe, where the 'international other' is constructed on the basis of strong opposition to the 'internal hierarchy' of the EU. This populism targets the core countries, primarily Germany and France, for their 'arrogance' and economic dominance. The rejection of the 'student' position is an essential populist demand in Central Eastern Europe. The Hungarian government's rhetoric positions the EU as a vehicle for globalist agendas, linking it with other globalist actors, such as Democrats in the US or human rights NGOs. As Orbán stated in 2018: 'every European country has the right to insist on the principle of one nation, one vote on the most important issues, and that this right must not be denied in the European Union. In other words, *we Central Europeans* claim that there is life beyond globalism, which is not the only path' (Hungarian Government, 2018). In 2021, at the Patriots Summit Orbán described globalists as follows: 'the globalist elites hate us, of course. The Brussels bureaucrats, the American Democrats, and the Soros network have launched a manhunt against us' (EU Debates, 2025).

In practice, the rise of illiberalism in Hungary and Poland (Pirro and Stanley, 2022) has led to the emergence of a bilateral form of right-wing international populism through sharing experiences and practices. The issue retains its relevance in light of the ongoing internal debate within the European Union concerning the rule of law. According to Özer et al. (2023), the tools applied by FIDESZ in Hungary and by PiS in Poland were analogous: criminalisation of minorities and immigrants, the intervention in the operations of supreme courts, the influence on the decisions of the judges, and the disregard for international law and/or supranational legal orders, though it is challenging to ascertain whether there was a conscious exchange of experiences or practices. However, Hungary may have serve as a model for PiS, as Kaczynski campaigned with the slogan 'Budapest in Warsaw'. As Sadurski (2018) writes: 'The sequence of the main "reforms" in Poland in many respects closely parallels that in Hungary a few years earlier'.

The introduction of the rule of law mechanism by the EU constituted an external factor that prompted Hungary and Poland to form a populist alliance. This bilateral alliance subsequently challenged the conditionality mechanism at the European Court of Justice with similar rhetoric. Regarding the debate surrounding the rule of law, Viktor Orbán made the following statement: 'collecting political accusations without clear legal categories under the banner of rule of law hurts the basic principles of rule of law' (Index, 2020), while Mateusz Morawiecki commented 'What is needed is a sovereign decision about sovereign decisions by sovereign member states' (The Guardian, 2021). Beyond protecting each other in the EU from external criticisms, their most assertive action was vetoing the seven-year EU budget because it included a rule of law condition. Finally, 'the way found to persuade the Hungarian and Polish governments to lift their vetoes was to circumscribe the purpose and



the potential application of the Regulation, specifically by toning down its connection with the rule of law' (Hillion, 2021).

Subsequent to this, Hungary remained solitary in its 'consistent use of veto power within unanimity procedures' (Guennoun, 2025), chiefly with regard to Ukraine and sanctions against Russia. Nevertheless, in 2023, the Visegrad Four (V4) group of identified shared concerns regarding economic disadvantage, following the European Commission's decision to lift import restrictions on Ukrainian grain. In response, the V4 nations initiated collaborative initiatives. In June 2025, both Hungary and Slovakia exercised their vetoes over the Commission's RePowerEU plan, which aimed to achieve the complete cessation of Russian energy imports (Euronews, 2025). This action proved successful, with both nations securing concessions.

The return of Robert Fico, Andrej Babiš and the election of a Polish president supported by the PiS have given rise to new opportunities for populist cooperation in Central Eastern Europe. In the context of the war in Ukraine, the formation of an alliance of countries that are sceptical of Ukraine (Politico, 2025) may be a possibility. However, the fall of the Orbán regime is anticipated to diminish the influence of populist voices in the Visegrad Group and lessen confrontative Central Eastern European populism in the EU.

(B3) The third structure of right-wing international populism in Central Eastern Europe is characterised by its reliance on social conservatism, with the most prominent manifestation of this ideology being the proliferation of CPAC (Conservative Political Action Conference) events. The practice has its origins in the United States, dating back to the 1970s. In recent years, it has become a regular forum for religious-conservative populists to exchange views and experiences in various regions. In Central Eastern Europe, Hungary was the first country to host such an event in 2022, and Poland joined in 2025 with CPAC Poland (Végh, 2025). Whilst these conferences invite speakers on a cross-regional basis and facilitate networking between US and European conservative circles, an increasing involvement of Central European right-wing populists may result in the reinforcement of international populism at the regional level.

The globalist/anti-globalist divide is rhetorically quite explicit in the CPAC network. As Miklós Szánthó, organiser of CPAC Hungary in 2025, highlighted, 'the three values of God, homeland and family are under heavy attack by globalists, who are well-prepared at the international level' (Isaac, 2025). This concept aligns with Orbán's perception of an underlying ideological conflict between progressive globalism and conservative nationalism, as he elucidates: 'They want to dismantle traditional frameworks—Christianity, the nation, the family. And we are the ones saying no.' (About Hungary, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c) Beyond that, the Orbán government portrays itself as 'the epicenter of the global fight against globalism' justified by the regular organisation of the CPAC Hungary and shaping the agenda (CPAC Hungary, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c).

The 'gender issue' (the changing position of women in society) is a central and regular topic at these conferences, as it is frequently associated with globalist values by populists. Right-wing populist leaders tend to conflate globalists with those who espouse cosmopolitan, liberal values and what is commonly referred to as 'gender



ideology’. The concept of ‘gender ideology’ has been described as a form of cultural imperialism that has been imposed by the UN, the US, and the EU, or more generally, the ‘liberal West’. Conversely, right-wing populists contend that the propagation of gender ideology constitutes a direct threat to the sexual identity of children and to ‘natural families’ (Vauchez & Robcis, 2025).

Beyond the scope of CPAC, right-wing populists in Central and Eastern Europe engage in a range of political actions aimed at subverting gender ideology. In recent years, Poland and Hungary have sought to exclude the phrase ‘gender equality’ from EU documents and to diverge from the joint EU position regarding the broadening of the definition of gender (Reuters, 2021). Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic signed but have not ratified the Istanbul Convention, with the decision being justified by similar rhetoric of rejecting the promotion of ‘gender ideologies’. Meanwhile, Poland proposed an alternative document (the Convention on the Rights of the Family), which was drafted by conservative and religious groups (Ciobanu, 2020).

Structures of right-wing international populism in Central Eastern Europe

Structure	Actors	Topics	Who are the globalists?	Dividing line
Visegrad Group	Poland, Hungary, Czechia and Slovakia	Migration, sovereignty	Brussels, member-states supporting migration, NGOs protecting migrants/refugees, George Soros	Globalist-nationalist/sovereignist
Central European populist alliance in the EU	Orbán, Morawiecki, Fico, Babiš	Democracy, rule of law, war in Ukraine	Brussels, EU ‘elite’, core countries	Globalist- nationalist/sovereignist
Network of socially conservative actors	Representatives of FIDESZ, PiS, SMER, ANO and non-political actors like think tanks, civilians and media actors	Social conservatism (gender, LGBTQ, family, woke)	Left-wing cosmopolitans, Western mainstream, feminists, sexual minorities and NGOs protecting them	Globalist-wokeist

Lack of unity and inconsistencies: regime changes and the war in Ukraine

Despite the emerging cooperation among right-wing Central European populists, they are far from being united. Ikenberry (2024) posits that Russia’s war on Ukraine is ‘pushing the world back in the direction of geopolitical and ideological groupings’. The approach to Russia (and China) created a schism amongst Central European populist politicians, despite their common anti-globalist and Eurosceptic stance. The war in Ukraine brought to the fore the fragility of right-wing international populism in Central Eastern Europe. Notwithstanding the existential crisis engendered by the



war in Ukraine for the V4 countries, no concerted action was pursued, due to the diversity of rhetoric and policies regarding the issue (Kaniok & Hloušek, 2025). Subsequently, existing bilateral populist Hungarian-Polish cooperation turned into tension and overwrote the joint fight against the rule of law mechanism.

Orbán, on populist grounds, divided the domestic and international arena into ‘pro-war’ versus ‘anti-war’ actors and argued for a ‘peaceful’ solution to terminate the war at all cost (Madlovics & Magyar, 2023) regardless of the potential consequences. Meanwhile Poland and the Czech Republic prioritised the provision of humanitarian, diplomatic and military assistance to Ukraine (Kaniok & Hloušek, 2024), along other EU memberstates. These developments broke the anti-Brussels populist axis in Central Europe and froze right-wing populist cooperation in the region for some years. Also, it prevented Central Eastern European populists to be united in the party structure of the European Parliament.

Another factor that burdens regional populism is regime change in the countries involved. In accordance with the logic of populism, domestic opposition is regarded as constituting part of the ‘globalist elite’. Consequently, it is considered to be quite impossible to cooperate with them on any matter, as was evident in the context of the conflicts between the Orbán and Tusk governments. Nevertheless, right-wing populist parties in opposition remain part of international populism and are legitimized through platforms such as CPAC and other right-wing populist networks. Indeed, the fact that right-wing populists do not always hold power highlights the significance of international populism at the non-state level.

Right-wing international populism in Latin America

Legitimation through rhetorical support

The Latin American right-wing populists examined in the article have had a relatively short period of time to support each other’s political campaigns; Jair Bolsonaro – as the first contemporary right-wing radical populist leader in Latin America – was elected in 2018, Nayib Bukele in 2019 and Javier Milei in 2023.

Bolsonaro introduced anti-globalism as ‘the official narrative of Brazil’s foreign policy’ (de Sá Guimarães et al., 2023) and worked to undermine the pink tide movement in Latin America. He achieved limited results, but the ascent of Javier Milei (2023), the re-election of Bukele (2024) (and the return of Trump (2025) have engendered novel opportunities for right-wing international populism in the region. Bukele’s high popularity and re-election has contributed to his rising international profile, strong regional popularity, and to serve as a model for other right-wing populists in Latin America. The election of Milei in Argentina, his ‘aggressive and vehement tone, a direct and brassy style, obsessed with insult and provocation’ (del Pino Diaz, 2024), has brought considerable international attention and connected Latin America as a region to the network of the global populist right.

Bolsonaro welcomed Milei by the following words in a video message: ‘I’m really happy ... You have a big job ahead of you... and it’s *a job that goes beyond Argentina*’ (Reuters, 2023), referring to the potential regional consequences of Milei’s



election. The plan ‘Milei 2023, Trump 2024, Bolsonaro 2026’ was formulated by supporters of both Bolsonaro and Milei and circulated on social media (France24, 2025) following the victory of the latter. The plan serves to reinforce the connection between the three leaders and to propose an anti-globalist future for the Americas. Since 2023, Milei and Bolsonaro have cultivated a positive relationship, while the official bilateral relations between Brazil and Argentina have experienced a notable deterioration. Milei has described Lula da Silva, Brazil’s left-wing president, as a ‘communist’ and has declared his unwillingness to engage with him (PBS News, CitationID="CR73">2024a, 2024b). In terms of regional politics, it was symbolic when, in July 2024, Milei did not attend the Mercosur meeting in Paraguay, instead joining Bolsonaro at CPAC Brazil. Both Milei and Bolsonaro have identified globalists with left-wing pink tide leaders and constructed anti-globalism against them. As Ernesto Araújo in 2019 explained:

‘Brazil was indeed a wonderful showcase for globalism. Starting with a traditional crony capitalism... the country went through fake economic liberalism in the 1990s, until it got to globalism under the Workers’ Party: cultural Marxism directed from within a seemingly liberal and democratic system, achieved through corruption, intimidation, and thought control.’ (quoted by de Sá Guimarães et al., 2023).

Salvador is a small Central American country, but as previously mentioned, Bukele’s success in combating organised crime and gang violence has made him popular in Latin America. In their respective political discourses, Bukele and Milei both position themselves as “saviours” who will fight against the elites and terminate corruption. A bilateral alliance between the two would serve to bolster Milei’s position as “part of the regional current of ‘tough leaders’ who want to change the rules of the game” (Buenos Aires Times, 2024). In 2024, Milei was present at Bukele’s inauguration, and Bukele visited Buenos Aires later that year. They are potential allies and likely to support each other in the forthcoming elections.

Regional cooperation against the globalists: anti-socialism, UN criticisms and CPAC

Latin American regional organisations, such as CELAC, ALBA or Mercosur, were established or re-established by left-wing pink tide leaders in the aftermath of 2000 and have been identified as symbols of Latin American left-wing populists’ anti-US agenda and of strong regional cooperation. Consequently, rising right-wing populists in Latin America follow a ‘passive, distant approach, focusing efforts and resources domestically’ (Wajner, 2025) and avoiding existing regional institutions. The phenomenon of cooperation among right-wing Latin American populists is a relatively recent development, manifesting in three distinct structures. The first is anti-socialism. Secondly, the joint rejection of UN-led global governance, especially in terms of environmental issues and human rights, is evident. Thirdly, in a manner analogous to Central Eastern Europe, there is an increase in regional interaction among conservative social actors, with national CPACs serving as central platforms for emerging right-wing international populism.



B1) The emergence of right-wing populist movements in Latin America can be understood as a response to the perceived failures of the Pink Tide, a left-leaning political movement that gained prominence during the 2000s. Right-wing populists form a highly fragmented group of leaders with different ideological backgrounds, but they ‘found their lowest common denominator in their uncompromising stance towards the traditional left’, while they ‘are also united by a market-oriented outlook that undoubtedly resonates particularly with the private sector’ (Suhr, 2026). The aim of this group is to cure the ‘damages’ caused by left-wing governments’ redistributive policies and social reforms.

Right-wing populists in Brazil, Argentina and Salvador reflect on demands such as freedom, order and security and are positioning themselves as ‘saviours’ of the people from socialist dictators (namely Nicolás Maduro, Daniel Ortéga and Miguel Díaz-Canel), social unrest and rising crime. ‘Latin America accounts for eight percent of the world’s population but about 30 percent of its homicides’ (Winter, 2026), so it is a primary concern for voters in Latin America. Furthermore, ‘the spread of evangelical Christianity in traditionally Catholic Latin America’ place ‘culture war issues such as abortion and “gender ideology” front and center’ (Winter, 2026). The aforementioned principles are in stark contrast with the progressive social values and policies espoused by the Pink Tide leaders, particularly with regard to the rights of women and sexual minorities.

Anti-socialism has also been observed to manifest itself in foreign policy changes, as evidenced by a shift from an anti-Western to a pro-Western stance (Wajner, 2026). For Bolsonaro, Milei and Bukele, Donald Trump serves as an external legitimising power. The following elements of Trumpism are particularly appealing to right-wing populists in Latin America: his anti-establishment approach, strongman image and anti-communist nationalism.

In this context, anti-globalism is characterised by a resurgence of nationalism, as Milei declared: ‘We’re going to make Argentina and America great again’ (Buenos Aires Times, 2025). This resurgence prioritises national interests over global concerns and a commitment to global solidarity. This perspective finds resonance with the ideological stance of right-wing Latin American populists, who have historically demonstrated a strong aversion to the globalist solidarity agenda espoused by leaders of the so-called ‘pink tide’ (Wajner & Roniger, 2022), who opposed neoliberalism and fought against poverty and social inequality.

B2) The Latin American right-wing populists examined are united in their anti-UN sentiments, which are based on two-fold criticisms. Firstly, they suggest that the UN relies on left-wing, globalist ideas, particularly in terms of the environment and the protection of human rights. Javier Milei criticized globalist UN to ‘impose socialist and collectivist agenda’ (Buenos Aires Herald, 2024), while Bolsonaro said: ‘Either the WHO works without an ideological party or we withdraw from this organization’ (Canik, 2020). Secondly, the UN is often criticised for its perceived inefficiencies and lack of utility.

The argument that the right to development is constrained by environmental concerns expressed by globalists is prevalent in Global South contexts (Crescentino, 2025). The discourse surrounding the tension between environmental sustainability and economic development has been a contentious one in Latin America for



centuries. In this context, Bolsonaro emerged as a prominent critic of ‘globalists’, whom he accused of ‘threatening Brazil’s territorial sovereignty and right to development’ (Lehoczki, 2024). Both Bolsonaro and Milei have been accused of legitimising extractivist policies by portraying environmental concerns as a construct of the globalist elite. Furthermore, both politicians have been accused of undermining climate action by portraying it as a threat to national sovereignty and economic growth (Crescentino, 2025). In practice, Bolsonaro’s administration withdrew Brazil’s bid to host the UN Climate Change Conference in 2019, while Milei’s administration described climate scientists as ‘lazy socialists’ and withdrew Argentine delegates from the COP29 United Nations climate summit in Baku (CNN, 2024). Milei’s argument is ‘all the policies that blame humans for climate change are bogus and just designed to raise money to fund socialist bums who write rubbish papers’ (Milei, 2024). This perspective aligns with Bolsonaro’s populist strategy of rejecting the scientific consensus in favour of appealing to the fears and economic concerns of their respective bases (Crescentino, 2025). Furthermore, Milei conceptualises the matter as an ideological dilemma, aligning environmentalists with the socialist political spectrum.

Beyond the realm of environmental concerns, the UN’s criticisms on behalf of Bolsonaro and Milei extend to human rights issues. Bolsonaro rejected UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) findings that the prosecution of Brazil’s former President, Luiz da Silva, violated his political rights, his right to a fair trial and his right to privacy (UN News, 2022), while he also criticized United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, then Michelle Bachelet, when she raised concerns over democratic setback and discrimination against indigenous communities in Brazil (Reuters, 2019). In 2025, Milei renounced Argentina’s candidacy for the UNHRC for the first time since the organization’s creation, criticizing the UN for imposing an ‘ideological agenda’ and raising concerns with regards to the inclusion of Cuba and Venezuela in the Council (EU See, 2025).

Furthermore, Milei has issued a series of critiques concerning the functioning of the United Nations in general. Beyond calling for stronger institutional efficiency, he described the UN as a ‘supranational model of governance led by international bureaucrats, who seek to impose a particular way of life on the citizens of the world’ (Buenos Aires Times, 2025). Bolsonaro declared in 2018 that he would quit the UN if he was elected (though he finally did not do so). Bukele did not attend the UN General Assembly in 2025, arguing that he felt it ‘pointless’ (The Tico Times, 2025). These rhetorics and actions undermine UN credibility and are consistent with the approach of Donald Trump to the organisation.

B3) Similarly to Central Eastern Europe, the emergence of CPACs in South America is a recent phenomenon and it serves as a regular forum for Latin American right-wing populists. The inaugural Latin American conference was convened in Brazil in 2019, where basically Brazilian and US conservative actors established links. Nevertheless, the year 2024 marked a pivotal shift; the election of Milei in Argentina gave rise to novel prospects for regional right-wing populism. He attended CPAC Brazil in 2024 and also in 2025, while Argentina hosted a CPAC in 2024. The latter was visited by Eduardo Bolsonaro (Jair Bolsonaro sent a video message) and Salvadoran Justice and Public Security Minister. Milei delivered a speech at CPAC



in the US both in both 2024 and 2025, thereby consolidating his position as an anti-globalist populist ally of Trump in the Western Hemisphere.

For South American right-wing populists, ‘woke-ism’ and especially ‘gender ideology’ is considered to be a ‘strategic enemy’; anti-feminist and anti-gender gender struggle is a reaction to the progressive gender policies of pink tide leaders and also to the conflict between progressive feminists/LGBTQI++ movements and neoliberalism (Saidel, 2025). Both Milei and Bolsonaro successfully presented gender ideology as a form of Cultural Marxism and mobilized secular and religious groups against it. Following their inauguration they both initiated institutional changes at ministerial level that served to weaken the protection of sexual minorities and victims of rape. Milei refers to abortion as ‘a murder aggravated by the bond’ and suggests that it should be illegal even in the case of rape and underage girls (Milei, 2024). In 2025 he portrayed a global struggle between woke and anti-woke forces, highlighting that ‘What once seemed like a global hegemony of the ‘woke’ left in politics, educational institutions, in the media, in supranational organizations or even in forums like Davos, has begun to crumble’ (CNBC, 2025).

In 2020, Bolsonaro issued an ordinance requiring doctors to report rape victims seeking abortions to the police. The Lula government terminated it, but several reports say that health professionals continue to fear prosecution (Los Angeles Times, 2025). In 2024, the Liberal Party (PL), led by Bolsonaro, and other conservative groups proposed a bill that would have equated abortion to homicide, even in cases of rape. However, due to widespread protests, the bill did not become law. With regards to sexual minorities, Bolsonaro declared ‘to be proud to be homophobic’ and stated that ‘I would be incapable of loving a homosexual son’ (The New York Times, 2018). Following his re-election in 2024, Bukele delivered a speech at CPAC in the US in which he asserted the importance of ensuring that the school ‘curriculum doesn’t [include] gender ideology and all these [other] things’ (El País, 2024).

Beyond ‘gender ideology’, the most regular topics of CPACs in Latin America are freedom and liberty (with an emphasis on safeguarding individual autonomy against governmental overreach) and the persecution of Christians globally. The first reflects a broader antipathy towards liberal states’ practice to intervene into personal lives and to dictate choices based on global principles such as sustainability or gender equality. It is important to note that Central European ‘illiberalism’ and Latin American right-wing populists’ liberty might seem to contradict, but they both tend to ‘guarantee’ freedom and liberty of ‘the people’, thus contrasting the oppression of the liberal establishment and liberal intellectuals.

Structures of right-wing international populism in Latin America

Structure	Actors	Topics	Who are the globalists?	Dividing line
Anti-socialism	Bolsonaro, Milei and Bukele	Economic policy, security	Pink tide leaders and their left-wing supporters	Globalist-nationalist



Structure	Actors	Topics	Who are the globalists?	Dividing line
Anti-UN cooperation	Bolsonaro, Milei, Bukele in line with Trump's approach	Climate change, human rights, anti-communism	UN bureaucrats, international elite supporting the UN, environmentalists	Globalist-Marxist/communist
CPAC	Network of social conservative actors, evangelical churches		NGOs, media and individuals advocating gender ideology	Globalist-wokeist

Lack of unity and inconsistencies

In a manner analogous to the situation in Central Europe, the emergence of right-wing international populism in Latin America is evidently constrained by frequent regime changes. A rising number of right-wing populists in power would create a favourable environment to reinforce the existing structures of regional populism. Conversely, if left-wing political actors succeed in the next few years, there is a possibility of the isolation of right-wing populists, as evidenced in the final two years of Bolsonaro's presidency (2021–2023).

The absence of institutional frameworks constitutes an additional impediment to robust collaborative endeavours. Cooperation among right-wing populists in Latin America is primarily driven by bilateral and informal interactions, rather than by engagement with existing structures of regional integration or involvement in regional issues. In the absence of converging regional interests or a unified regional agenda, the cooperation is constrained, primarily manifesting as a mutual expression of disapproval directed towards the globalists.

Furthermore, the actors associated with globalism vary considerably. In the case of Bolsonaro, globalists—on cultural Marxist grounds—attack the fundamental Judeo-Christian values of the Western civilization (de Sá Guimarães et al., 2023); Milei takes 'a position favoring globalization without embracing globalist principles' (Merke & Pereyra Doval, 2024), showing strong pro-trade attitude, while rejecting the UN's Agenda 30 as a 'globalist conspiracy' (Thiers, 2025). Despite these similarities, Milei follows anti-globalist narratives instead of nationalism (Jalit, 2024), and represents an anti-Russia position, that is more aligned with that of Italy's Meloni or the AfD in Germany, than with that of Bolsonaro who visited Moscow days before the Russian invasion of Ukraine. For Bukele, 'globalists' are primarily identified with actors (IGOs, NGOs, domestic opposition) who criticize him for human rights abuses and raise concerns regarding the long-term consequences of his domestic measures to reduce crime. His anti-globalist right-wing populism is reminiscent of conspiracy theories, a trend that is not confined to this region (Chacko, 2025; Pirro and, Taggart, 2023; Wojczewski, 2022). Despite his regional popularity, Bukele occupies a marginal position among Latin American right-wing populists, his role is limited to rhetorical support.



Conclusion

This article contributes to the literature by showing how anti-globalist populism functions as a mechanism of cross-border regional convergence. In both regions, right-wing populists have established parallel, yet overlapping, structures of international populism in order to ‘protect themselves’ from globalists and actors of global governance.

The first research question asked how right-wing international populism is implemented at the regional level. A comparative analysis of Latin American and Central Eastern European case studies reveals several important similarities.

Firstly, mutual campaign support constitutes a core layer of international populism and an essential tool of legitimisation. Such support is implemented through multiple channels, including rhetorical endorsement (typically through personalised praise), pre-electoral meetings, and, in some cases, financial assistance. Legitimation serves two primary purposes. On the one hand, it aims to undermine domestic and international criticism concerning authoritarian tendencies and democratic backsliding by framing such critiques as politically motivated attacks. On the other hand, mutual campaign and rhetorical support reinforces the perception in both regions that populists offer a legitimate alternative to liberal democracy—one that challenges the ‘establishment’, weakens the position of the ‘liberal/socialist elite’, and claims to represent the authentic interests of ‘the people’.

At the regional level, the cross-border ‘people’ in Latin America are ideologically opposed to socialists and communists; politically opposed to the legacy and institutions of the Pink Tide; economically opposed to redistribution and climate constraints in favour of neoliberalism; and morally opposed to gender ideology and sexual minorities. In Central Eastern Europe, cross-border ‘people’ are politically opposed to ‘Brussels’ (core EU member states and Eurocrats) and to migration on sovereigntist grounds, and morally opposed to gender ideology and sexual minorities on illiberal grounds.

Secondly, strong and electorally successful right-wing populist leaders function as regional hubs of cooperation. In Central Eastern Europe, Viktor Orbán represented a key hub, possessing sufficient influence to shape the regional agenda around Euroscepticism, migration, and gender ideology. When he was supported by like-minded populist leaders in the Visegrad Group, he was able to utilise V4 as an instrument to reinforce his anti-migration populist agenda. In Latin America, among the actors analysed only Bukele was reelected and lack of interest in building regional institutions has prevented the rise of a regional hub. Evidence indicates that, rhetorically Orbán had the most explicit anti-globalist message at the regional level, while in Latin America Bolsonaro and Milei’s rhetoric is perceived to be the most pronounced in its anti-globalist sentiment.

Thirdly, cooperation among right-wing populists in both regions is multifaceted and multilayered, consisting of overlapping forms of cooperation. At the inter-state level, bilateral links serve as cores of regional cooperation. In CEE the Hungarian-Polish axis represented the most prominent manifestation of international populism, while in Latin America the Bolsonaro-Milei alliance is the



most salient expression of this phenomenon (though Bolsonaro was in opposition when Milei was elected). Beyond intergovernmental relations, expanding transnational networks among right-wing populists are evident through the involvement of conservative think tanks, churches, and civil society actors (Abrahamson et al., 2024). Regionally organised CPAC events are particularly significant in this regard. However, right-wing populists in both regions tend to be involved in global platforms of international populism. The phenomenon of regional and cross-regional platforms of international populism can be considered complementary in their ‘joint’ struggle against the globalist elite.

Despite these similarities, important regional differences remain. In Central Eastern Europe, traditional ties within the Visegrad Group were instrumentalised to reinforce international populism at the regional level. In Latin America, by contrast, right-wing populism is a more recent and institutionally fragile phenomenon. Consequently, the implementation of international populism is in its infancy, weak and less structured. Nevertheless, the decline of the Orbán regime and the rise of José Antonio Kast in Chile may lead to a shift in these dynamics.

At the regional level, the evolution and intensity of international populism are highly dependent on electoral dynamics. Electoral victories of right-wing populists in geographically proximate countries typically lead to increased mutual support and political cooperation, whereas electoral defeats may rapidly result in regional isolation and hostile political environments. However, hybrid forms of international populism, including state- and non-state actors, seem to be more essential at the global and regional level alike. These hybrid networks play a crucial role in sustaining cross-border populist cooperation even when key leaders are no longer in power.

The second research question examined how right-wing populists use ‘globalists’ as an empty signifier to construct the image of ‘international elites’. Populists seek to resolve the challenge of representation by constructing the image of a unified and homogeneous people (Vauchez & Robcis, 2025). Anti-globalism functions as an empty signifier that enables the construction of a shared identity among this ‘people’ at both regional and global levels. Its analytical utility lies in its breadth: anti-globalism is sufficiently flexible to encompass a wide range of values and principles attractive to populist actors, thereby operating as a ‘symbolic glue’ (Kováts et al., 2015) that binds these actors together.

Populists associate anti-globalism with multiple issue areas, primarily on sovereignty and legitimising grounds. At the domestic level, ‘globalists’ are typically identified with political opponents and foreign actors perceived to support them. This framing relies on nationalist and sovereigntist logic: those who belong to ‘the people’ are positioned within the nation, while the opposition is depicted as betraying national interests by serving foreign forces, regardless of its actual ideology or policy positions.

Right-wing cross-border populism reinforces anti-globalist agendas by repeatedly foregrounding key issues, such as state sovereignty, global governance, migration, and gender ideology; and by criticising globalist actors such as the EU, the UN, NGOs, LGBTQ++ movements, liberal media, and intellectuals. Variations in tone and style, ranging from moderate to overtly provocative, as well as the expansion of issue areas and critical frames, appear to broaden the scope of cooperation but



place constraints on its depth. The sustained use of populist rhetoric and polarising identity constructions has facilitated convergence among diverse actors around anti-globalist positions. In both regions, globalism is perceived as such a fundamental threat that unity against globalist structures becomes a strategic imperative.

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