



## Discussing the Patterns and the Outcomes of Populism in Southern Africa

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### ABSTRACT

**And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve (2 Corinthians 11:14-18)** As per the scripture above, populism despite claiming to be the salvation of the country and for the masses is in all ways, the devil that appears as the angel of light but in effect has the intention and objective of deceiving the entire country. The deception stems from the fact that the agents of populism who are likened to the servants of the devil above, masquerade themselves as having the welfare of the country at heart and fighting for the good of the entire country. Alas, they are in the pursuit of personal glory, power, and aggrandizement. More so, they hold the sinister agenda of enslaving the entire country to maintain their grip in power. Lastly, regardless of their many promises, and show of good faith, populism by nature is no one's friend but self and cares for no one but self.

**Keywords:** populism

### INTRODUCTION

The changing global order brings with it a fast paced need to catch up with the big powers, the fastest growing economies such as China and India (Andaman Partners, 2025), and the global policy makers such as the members of the G20, G7 (Congressional Research Service, 2020), and regional powers in the BRICS, Shanghai Development Organization and NATO. While some countries in Africa such as Ethiopia, are believed to be within the framework of dynamic and sustained economic growth (Andaman Partners, 2025), the rest of the continent seems to be drawn in limbo. Implausible political promises made by gerontocracies (The African Mirror, 2025) mostly in the Central African Economic Region and Eastern Africa, most of which are marred with novel election rigging machineries of the finest order. Examples of these include Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, and Uganda. On the other hand, Tanzania is not exempt from accusations of election rigging and seems to represent East Africa well (Mwanga, 2022) following the just ended 2025 presidential elections (Nestroy, 2025). Seeing that Africa has one of the oldest reigning presidents/kings, and following the traditional belief that age comes with wisdom, it might also be argued that old age is synonymous to a living encyclopedia. With that a foundational legacy for wisdom, a human library with experiences gathered over the years worthy of helping, perfecting and promoting a person, group, society, or nation as a whole. Lumun (2013) agrees and adds that “older people were highly valued in African society because of their accumulated knowledge and wisdom, which they used to settle disputes, integrate the society and educate the young”. While this might be true in some respects and maybe in some parts of Africa, for the most part, it's a sham. A look at the current political economy reflects the total opposite. These old people in power might be everything except full of benefiting wisdom

as previously believed. Populism then gains steam within the framework of these old and very aged presidents who have refused to leave power to allegedly "*the youths and leaders of tomorrow*". Instead, populism under this guise presents itself without reasonable doubt as an angel of darkness posing as an angel of light but laden with empty and fake promises that can only guarantee a progressive backwardness. A close look at the Republic of Chad under the late Idris Derby Itno should shock anyone. He spent over 22 years in power, and yet, the country remained poor even after his death.

## **Hypothesis**

Populism and its actors have nothing to offer but vain and empty promises, so while forcing themselves to the masses as the nation's best, they directly incite civil unrest, promote state sponsored terrorism and engender the violent spirit of nationalism as retaliation.

## **Research Objectives**

The objective of this research is firstly, to answer what is populism. Secondly, to understand the traditional foundation of populism. Thirdly, to discuss why populism is strongly used in Southern Africa. Fourthly, to understand the limitations of populism and, lastly, to review how the proper application of populism relates to national civil disobedience.

## **Research Questions**

- What is populism?
- What is the traditional foundation of populism?
- Why is populism very much strongly used in Southern Africa?
- What are the limitations of populism?
- How does the proper application of populism relate to national civil disobedience?

## **Drafting the Problem Statement**

The systematic delivery of fake promises to rehabilitate the country and bring it to an emerging economy by African Heads of States has been the norm in the last decade. In the Central African Economic Region, the heads of state all have promises to bring their countries to emergence or an emerging economy by 2025 to 2035 respectively. For example, according to Paul Biya, who promised Cameroon to be an emerging economy by 2025 in his new year speech of December 31<sup>st</sup>, this will be achieved through *Security: Strengthening Stability and Unity, Economic Growth: Resilience Amid Global Challenges, Infrastructure and Social Services: Transformative Investments, Governance and Anti-Corruption: A Renewed Commitment, Climate Change and Natural Disaster Preparedness, and Elections in 2025: Strengthening Democracy* (Cameroononline, 2025). Nevertheless, and very typical to these African presidents, to achieve this, they portray an attitude very opposite of the African Union's 2063 goals which is to promote "democratic values, practices, universal principles of human rights, justice and the rule of law entrenched" (African Union, 2025). Democratic values are constantly abused as presidents like Denis Sassou Nguesso of Congo Brazzaville (*in power for from 1979 - 1992 years and from 1997 onwards*), Paul Biya of Cameroon (*in power since 1982*), Obiang Nguema of Equatorial Guinea (*in power from 1979 - 1982 and from 1982 onwards*), Yoweri Museveni of Uganda (*in power since 1986*), Paul Kagame of Rwanda (*in power since 2000*), and Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea (*in power since 1993*), have all been in power for more than twenty five years and still counting. Unfortunately, with many African countries, though they preach democracy, and

claim to uphold democratic values, they are overladen by dictatorships and authoritarian regimes as the ones mentioned above. To stay in power, these regimes corrupt and use all the organs of the government and relentlessly preach that they are the only ones who can lead the country to development and prosperity. This is not only particular to the ruling parties but also the opposition and other political aspirants. Political aspirants hold the rhetoric of not being corrupted by the existing political establishment and claim to understand the pain and sufferings of the people more than the ruling party (Resnik, 2010). They appear audacious and very charismatic, much to the admiration of the impoverished masses. The veracity of their criticisms of the ruling party and claims of piety echoes like brass and reveal how good of an orator the party or candidates are. For the most part, the ruling party holds the most power, money, resources and international connections to solidify their assertions. They hold the leverage that the international community must respect them as leaders of sovereign nations. This leverage solidifies their legitimate grip to power and the pressure exerted on their masses. Where these fail, and when they fail to force these assertions down the throats of overladen citizens, they are swift to adopt the political culture of repression and intimidation of political opponents, the civil society and the entire country at large. (Hassan, 2025). Here the rule of law, the practice of justice and human rights are defined according to the wills of the regime in power.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to discuss the patterns and the outcomes of populism in the so-called emergence of African Economies by 2025 to 2035. For over a decade African political regimes, most of which are dictatorships, have preached that they are the only ones who have the political and economic abilities to bring the countries to prosperity and success. Despite claiming to be democratic, these countries under siege by their respective regimes are very undemocratic. This paper, therefore, aims to add to existing scholarship and fill any gaps in research. Secondly, the paper aims to provoke maybe for the first time, genuine public policy and generate a frank conversation on policy tables regarding regime welfare vs. state welfare. When this happens, this paper hopes it will be the beginning of the end to dictatorships, authoritarianism, the systematic abuse of the law and the violent abuse of human rights.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study will use the qualitative method whereby the political phenomenon will be studied in depth. To gather information, think tanks, journals, newspapers, reports, and essays shall be consulted. This research method was chosen because it directly addresses the objectivity and subjectivity of the study. It also provides the researcher the opportunity to have a great number of tools to gather and analyze data. The literature review will be done in a prearranged way and the analysis of the data done such that they do not stray away from the research questions.

### **Importance of Choosing this Method**

This research method shall provide the researcher with the ability to be dynamic in his research i.e. it will give him the ability to triangulate the data collection, analysis and interpretation. Furthermore, the researcher will not be rigid at looking at the research questions from one traditional standpoint but will be able to rotate freely and look at the research questions from different angles. The possibility of considering different arguments whether for or against to answering the research questions and proving or disproving the hypothesis is another good to the study. Next, during the research, there might be uncertainties that prevent the use of one

or more methodologies. This method will help the researcher to adapt his research methodology, paving way for creativity, critical and broadways analysis. Since this study will be reviewing the independent and dependent variables, it simply implies that there might be some aspects of multidisciplinary approaches to the study. This is also particular if the researcher plans to use more than one theory in his theoretical framework. This approach will help the researcher to broadly navigate the complexities of any huddles he might meet during these review while keeping his eyes and focus on the outcomes of the study.

### **Data Research Tool**

The data research tool shall be literature review of the scholarship of data available on the subject. The importance of using this research tool which will most likely be digital through specialized academic outlets, is that it will provide the ability for the researcher to reach materials and data from a greater controlled and uncontrolled population at different geographical locations without actually having to be there. One of the fundamental reasons is that though the researcher would like to be present in Southern Africa to speak with the denizens of the countries mostly affected by populism he can't at this material time. Another reason is that, seeing the growing security concerns related to xenophobia in some parts of South Africa, using this research tool, despite its own limitations, ensures the security and safety of the researcher. Lastly, the suitability of this data tool guarantees that since the tool shall directly address the growing concerns listed in the research questions, the researcher shall be allowed the ability to explore the different arguments of other papers and researchers. At some point, this paper will be revised and another issue written with the quantitative method adopted. The researcher believes that at that time, he will be able to administer questionnaires that will allow the respondents to provide responses following their own experiences, struggles and perspectives of the subject under research. This will provide additional authenticity, accuracy, and announce the credibility of the data as the respondents will be allowed to respond freely according to the growing realities of their daily lives without having to worry about plagiarism and the conscription of copied responses.

### **MAIN BODY AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

When populism is mentioned in Africa, it strikes the reader firstly, to consider a mind travelling trip to Southern Africa where the subject has been greatly studied and documented. The countries of Zambia, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa, stand tall in the African continent as far as populism is concerned. Suffices to say that contrary to the actors either in the civil society or government, populism doesn't in any way reflect to the outright practice of democratic principles. Well, it claims to be but until now, there is no documented evidence that populism is directly related to the practice of democracy in Southern Africa. This is because democratic countries are bound by the rule of liberal democratic laws that forbid one take all. Instead, countries, with dictatorial, authoritarian and totalitarian governments champion the practice of populism (Nafzger, 2025). Although somewhat different, despite the alternation of presidents in South Africa, the ANC – African National Congress, has dominated for the most part since the end of apartheid.

On its own, populism is just a word unless energy is pumped into its engine to make it a speech act. In order for populism to work, it must firstly be founded on a sure foundation; one that is commonly used either worldwide or regionally. Nafzger (2025) continues that populism works best through a fiery rhetoric, anti-elite messages, and dramatic public performances. All of

which are highly dependent on weak or cosmetic institutions taken hostage by the gerontocracy. Another foundation to consider is that government failures in services, welfare, and employment create fertile ground for populist support and lastly, populist narratives further inflame hate speech and fuel societal divisions (Sithole, Neo; Ngujol, Gabriel Cyril & Micozzi, Martina, 2024). With this foundation it's now feasible that populism and its actors have the leeway to glide through with their egocentric, occult and retrogression agenda. Most populist countries in Southern Africa, with the exception of the Apartheid developed South Africa, are underdeveloped and struggling economies. Counting on weak institutions held hostage to maintain themselves in power, they continue with another important asset to sublime their legitimacy. Before mentioning this next asset, it must be stressed that, populism and its practice are a direct attack to democratic values and a synthetic open door to the entire crisis related to the lack of proper democratic practices. Under the practice of populism in Southern Africa and the continent at large, there is no surety for the rule of law, human rights and justice. If there are, then the regimes will constitutionally not be in power. For the countries concerned, these bequeath questions of political legality and legitimacy. How these questions are handled for the most part largely depends on the poor mental health of the governments clinching to power by any and every means possible. The continuous clinching to power comes with a price and seeing these regimes have been in business for over two decades reveals whatever this price is, it is nothing they can't pay. As a matter of fact, one of the prices is the normalization of state sponsored violence masqueraded as the pursuit of national security. Evaristus (2019) believes that for populist dictatorial regimes to succeed, they must needs corrupt and hold all organs of the state hostage to secure their agenda. The failure to do so means their auto destruction is inevitable. Consequently, the political culture of state sponsored terrorism, fear mongering, arbitrary arrests, murder and the forceful propaganda of a peaceful country under law remains a must under all circumstances.

Looking back at the post-colonial direct rule and the declaration of independence for most African states most of which were marred by wars of liberation and calls for independence, most populist leaders, freedom fighters then, have depended on the war rhetoric as a means to an end. Brooks (2002) discusses that freedom fighters during the wars of independence, in power today, continue to use the war rhetoric as a viable asset to hold onto power. Furthermore, populist parties in Africa frequently rely on the continued heroic narrative of former liberation movements, seeking to connect the electorate with the country's past to legitimize the present political realities. They always connect the past and present revolutionary wars and appeal to a still-present struggle against foreign domination, marketing themselves as the only true alternative and promise of a better future (Sithole, Neo; Ngujol, Gabriel Cyril & Micozzi, Martina, 2024). So, whether during the colonial or post-colonial era, populism is simply the regime fighting to maintain control over their well-defined existential threat. This threat usually, is used as a bases to convince the populace most of which are youths and living below a dollar a day, that they are the only ones who can save the country from local and foreign domination. Mehlber (2018) discusses how the Namibian regime under its former president Nujoma had positioned itself as the only party with the capacity of saving the country from any threat. More so, Nujoma had said his party will be in power for over a thousand years. Secondly, this same rhetoric had been recycled by the late Robert Mugabe, who despite having lost the elections; denied Morgan Tsvangirai his legitimate victory because according to him, the latter didn't fight the wars of independence, lacked the war hero rhetoric. By this he was considered a sell out to the British (Mesara, 2019). Lastly, Ngope (2016) cites the former South

African President, Jacob Zuma who said that 'the ANC will remain in power until Jesus Christ returns'. If these are all considered under the lens of rationality, the distance between populism and dictatorship is simply shorter than one cell thick. Some countries like post Mugabe Zimbabwe have been skillful to change the face and the hat of the game and deceive the country of an alternation of power. However, in effect, it's the same old broom and associates of the former president. Yes, it's the same old regime with a new name and docket. It's the same old banga! Safe to say populism once in power, almost never goes, except by fire power. The late Mobutu could best explain this.

While the foundation and the asset of populism just mentioned might sound appealing for some time and even convince the electorate of the legitimacy of the leader or party, it must not be denied that they come with serious limitations. The first is the shifting electorate who are mostly youths. The shift stands on the growing expectations of a strong leader who will put promises to practice. Most importantly, the youths are educated, tired of corruption, outspoken and daring to address their rights. More and more, African governments are questioned to power by angry disgruntled youths who believe they are taken for fools by the old layers in power. With dementia reigning in most African presidential palaces by very old presidents who should have retired and who sometimes forget themselves in public, the youths, are beginning not to fear the one-sided military anymore. More so, despite that the charismatism of the politician or party might capture the minds and votes of the youths for a time, this quickly changes when the populist government like any other doesn't put words and promises to action. The disappointment quickly grows to resentment, public disorder and violence. Furthermore, since most populist countries are decorated by brainless militaries that protect the gerontocracy governments rather than the people, the fear of death is reducing as many are ready to die for their rights. Burkina Faso came strong with the supervised fall of the Compaore regime in 2014. Despite deploying loyalist soldiers to repress angry protesters, his fall was inescapable and brought an end to his twenty-seven year reign (Mukuna, 2014).

Populism can never last forever because at its prime, it always leads to anger, protests that can turn violent, bloody and fatal. Reviewing the case in Uganda with its everlasting one party system, Carbone (2005) believes that the population eventually gets tired and tirelessly asks for a change in government. The arrogance of the government and backward culture of violent political crackdown of activists, leads to the spirit of nationalism and rebellion that could engulf the entire country in flames. In countries like South Sudan and the Central African Republics, these have led to not only violent and bloody exchanges between loyalists and rebels groups but also civil wars and coups (Evaristus, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

To conclude this paper has been careful to address and answer all the research questions. More so, it's important to note that the foundation, assets that is the rhetoric of populism and its limitations and how populism leads to national civil disobedience have been reviewed. From the argument it's safe to say that populism doesn't explain in legal and legitimate terms why the 'charismatic' party or person should be in power. Despite knowing how to sing and dance like Jacob Zuma, why should this person or party be in power?

Well, firstly, according to the hypothesis, because they have nothing to offer except tell lies and make cosmetic promises. The logical examination of this question should probably produce no

reasonable answer. In a world where the changing global order moves fast and globalization has taken a sudden turn with the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI), African nations, mostly, Southern African nations need more than just a charismatic leader. Wearing the traditional regalia of a particular ethnicity, singing and dancing to their traditional songs during election periods don't suffice. These are the nitty-gritties of populists and their most invaluable ingredients and argument by which to draw close to the people for obvious reasons.

A second answer to the question is because no serious argument holds the premise of sending and keeping populists in power. Evaristus (2019) showed that there is a direct link between populism, polarization, civil unrest and civil wars. According to him populist regimes have nothing to offer to their countries because, the growing unpopularity of the war rhetoric, weak institutions, the seemingly futureless ride with the party in power, creates a foundation for the activation of all the ingredients of civil wars according to Collier, Hoeffler, and Rohner (2009). By now, Cameroon, Uganda and South Sudan should serve as good examples. The Central African Republic another good example remains a failed state because successive populist Christian regimes overlooked the Muslim north. The violent rise of Michel Djotodia in 2012 was the answer to those years of mistreatment and politico-religious isolation.

The current changing global order with its weapons of post modernity and advanced globalization has as objective to ease the advancement of the human mind and life. Technological progressions have drawn humanity closer than ever before and are creating economic opportunities like never seen before. Developed countries are heavily cashing out on this and work relentlessly to strengthen their economies, create more opportunities for their youths, and produce millionaires and billionaires. These add to their national pride, their diplomatic and sociopolitical powers. However, the situation is seemingly different in Africa. Laying aside the geopolitical argument of neocolonization, with the exception of the apartheid developed South Africa; Egypt and Morocco, populist countries are laden by old, mentally outdated, diaper wearing dementia stricken politicians and head of violent and bloody regimes that only care about their power. These are holding the line and heartlessly pumping the brakes to Africa's rise to global political economy as impassable contributors, givers and not only beggars and handout receivers. The progressive backwardness of most African economies, the slow development of their economies, for those matching forward, and the disheartening progression of China within the continent, is eloquent testimony that the study of populism is necessary at this time to redirect public policy in the continent. Not forgetting that populism has a direct embodiment to anger, the search for the opportunity to retaliate and post electoral violence as loyal neighbors.

Political and religious isolation in pre-divided Sudan, The Central African Republic live close to each other. The mistreatment of Christians in Sudan led to decade long wars between the Muslim government and Christian minority that resulted in the split of the country, the birth and independence of South Sudan. More so, as mentioned above, the response of the Muslim marginalization in the Central African Republic through Michel Djotodia, currently on exile (Wikipedia, 2025), resulted to the rise of the Muslim Seleka and the Christian Anti-Balaka rebel groups. Today, The Central African Republic is disfigured in a bloody and sectarian violence with refugee spill overs in Cameroon, Chad, and other neighboring countries. During the cold war, the populist Siad Bare regime had positioned itself as the only salvation of Somalia. However, the end of the cold war exposed its nakedness, and assured a fall to never rise again.

History Rise (2024) describes it as “the fall of the Somali government after the Cold War was as a result of factors, including authoritarian rule, clan based politics, and economic mismanagement. The collapse was marked by a complete government breakdown, leaving behind a power vacuum that was quickly filled by clan based warlords and extremist groups. This period of instability led to the emergence of warlordism, the rise of Al-Shabab, and the displacement of millions of Somalis. The international community has struggled to reconstruct Somalia due to the entrenched social divisions and the legacy of state failure”.

Furthermore, though populist countries like Equatorial Guinea and Eritrea have enjoyed some level of state sponsored forcefully imposed peaceful scrutiny without any threatening uprising, populism cannot still be trusted. As the saying goes, *“everyone has their turn at the barber”*. In addition, just like a Tiger cannot hide its marks, populism cannot also hide its ability to bequeath unrest.

Evidently, Somalia has taught us that the study of populism must be linked power vacuums that birth the violent rise of cessation (Somaliland and Puntland). Secondly, systematic populist policies built on colonial legacy promoting the political isolation and exclusion of Igbos from the Nigerian presidency (Okoroafor, 2025) partly have favor the creation and promotion of the Biafra Republic in Nigeria. Others within the same pipeline include the Yoruba Republic in the making and the violent spirits of nationalism across the continent. These are followed by civil unrests that see growing dissent to political institutions and governments. In response, despite the violent and fatal government sponsored crackdown of protesters such as in the post-electoral Cameroon 2025 presidential elections (United Nations, 2025), the post-electoral Tanzania presidential elections 2025 (Hezer, 2025), the youths remain undeterred. The social media, now a power political and policy tool reveals that the unflinching rise of angry youths stained by unemployment, disease, lack of opportunities, and government repression has bestowed rising violence towards security forces and government officials, rising armed groups, calls for cessation in post-cold war Somalia, Cameroon, Nigeria and South Africa not forgetting terrorism. Speaking of terrorism, the mode of recruitments is different in Africa and in the West. In Africa, the lack of economic opportunities and raging poverty creates the avenue for terrorist groups such as Boko Haram, and Al Shabab to recruit within their ranks. During which time, the gerontocracy and oligarchs with incontinence in bowel or bladder or even both, live in plenty and continue to arrogantly maim, steal, kill and destroy the youths and the leaders of tomorrow. Meanwhile in Europe and other Western countries, where economic and social opportunities abound, recruitments into terrorist organizations are mostly through ideologies and brainwashing.

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