

Populism

necessary instrument of analysis or brakeman of discourse? Political debates between complex problems and easy answers

„I think Islam hates us,“ –“I want to be the president of all Americans.“ Between these two sentences were only eight months when Donald Trump turned out to be the winner of the US presidential election on November 9th, 2016. Their contrariness makes us wonder which meaning political content has in our present-day discourse. To what extent does political content matter when citizens form their opinions on political persons and parties? As another example, the co-organizer of PEGIDA at that time, Kathrin Oertel, gave a speech on January 12th, 2015 in Dresden stating that PEGIDA was neither islamophobic nor xenophobic nor even racist. This sentence is contrary to many of the posters that were carried by her listeners during the respective demonstration – such as “Islam = Cancer” – as explained in a study of the WZB Berlin by Dieter Rucht et al. The contrast of these statements appears to have little to no impact in the form of irritation or refusal among the audience and on the success of the weekly protests. Why is that? Are we experiencing a shift of discourse in which new “sayables” are emerging? Or is such a rational approach to the recent discourse no longer promising?

Are the most vigorously debated issues possibly just a superstructure hiding the fact that the actual controversy regards social inequalities and tensions as well as frustration or disappointment concerning the lack of impact on the political shaping of our society? One way to find answers to these questions leads to the term *populism*, which is primarily characterized by the construction of a border between the “élites” and the “common people” and promises easy answers to complex questions. Are we experiencing a new high in populism in our political landscape?

How can the term populism be useful as an analytical instrument of recent political and social discourses? Why do phenomena such as the rise of right-wing parties, dissatisfaction with “those up above” and a refusal of open borders in many welfare states resemble each other? How can we – as a science and as the young generation – meet these discourses in a constructive way?

Have you thought about these questions in a seminar paper, a presentation, a research project or a thesis? Would you like to present your approach to a wider sociological circle? Then we are happy to receive your texts until **December 20th, 2016** for a blog series on populism.

Please send your papers, comments or questions to sarah.kaschuba@soziologiemagazin.de.

We look forward to hearing from you!