

Populist is a pressing concern for International Human Rights Law:

The global rise of populism derives out of the political approach that appeals to the ordinary people who feel disregarded by established elite groups. Populists tend to frame politics as a battle between the virtuous 'ordinary' masses and a nefarious or corrupt elite – and insist that the general will of the people must always triumph.¹ It offers immediate answers to complicated problems that usually blame some other groups along the way.² It poses a major concern for international human rights given the rise of nativism, xenophobia, racism, islamophobia and misogyny.

Intolerance Attitude:

The rise of intolerance attitudes is a threat to human rights everywhere. For instance, post 9/11 saw security concerns for United States of America. These concerns have given rise to fear and hatred for foreigners and the rise of islamophobia. Populist leaders exploit this as a means to gain popularity by justifying restriction of freedom of movement, right to privacy and cultural intolerance to address security concerns. Global increasing threats and security concerns have seen countries such France implementing and extending draconian state of emergency only to be replaced by an equally draconian anti terrorism law. The draconian anti terrorism law is interpreted by many as putting France in a permanent state of emergency. The law gives power to the police and local authorities to close mosques, search homes, restrict movements of individuals and dramatically reduce people's rights and makes matters worse by targeting Muslim community.³ In keeping well within the Populist leadership trait the French government insists the powers represents a “true balance between necessary security for our citizens and the protection of individual liberties.” The present day danger to this form of leadership is the openness of the public to accept it and not raise concerns where and when it needed to be raised.

The rise of Populist leadership has also seen the shrinking role of civil society in most countries. NGO are controlled by government and most operate without authorization with the possibility of arrest and imprisonment. The only ones that thrive are the ones sponsored by the Government. In Egypt for example the Government limit the type of work NGO can carry out and filters information workers provide to international bodies.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/>

³ <https://www.ft.com/content/f5309ff8-a521-11e7-9e4f-7f5e6a7c98a2>

Recent years have also witness the lack of respect by leaders for international humanitarian law. In a 2016 opinion poll undertaken by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), a mere 30 per cent of American respondents considered it to be unacceptable to torture a captured enemy combatant ‘to obtain important military information’. In the same poll, taken in 1999, the figure had been 65 per cent. In Nigeria, 70 per cent supported such torture and in Israel 50 per cent did (ICRC 2016: 10).⁴ Further to this the UK Prime Minister express intention to liberate British forces from constraints imposed in accordance to the European Convention on Human Rights. President Donald Trump on the other hand made similar noises about how US troops had fought ‘very politically correct’ wars implying that they should not be constrained by laws and standards that their enemies don’t fully respect. His most specific proposal for dealing with terrorists was the insight that ‘you have to take out their families.’⁵

The convincing way Populist have sold political agendas to the public and its enormous success in doing so has put international human rights law in a very uncomfortable position as it creates a degree of uncertainty and exposes the fragility of international human rights institutions. It is for the people to change this.

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⁴ <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/hux007>

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