

Varieties of Populism in a Changing Global Context

The Divergent Paths of Erdoğan and *Kirchnerismo*

S. Erdem Aytaç and Ziya Öniş

Neoliberal globalization as an on-going process since the mid-1970s consists of distinct phases. The early years of neoliberal reforms associated with the rise of the “Washington Consensus” displayed a widespread optimism in the dominant policy and academic circles concerning the benefits of liberalization and free markets. The expectation was that the rise of the free market and the parallel retreat of the state would help to generate rapid growth, overcoming the stagnationist tendencies embodied in import-substitution regimes, the benefits of which would trickle down to wide segments of society. There was no need, according to this scenario, to be directly concerned with income inequality, given the positive effects of growth on poverty alleviation.

The early optimism associated with the Washington Consensus experienced a serious reversal during the course of the 1990s, however, due to two principal reasons. First, the frequency of the financial crises experienced in the global south pointed towards a crucial weakness of financial and capital account liberalization, often engineered without adequate safeguards in terms of building regulatory institutions. Second, neoliberal reforms have been highly inegalitarian in their impact in most national contexts.¹ These factors have produced a serious backlash in many parts of the global south, leading to a new phase of neoliberalism: the “post-Washington Consensus.” The policies of key international institutions during this new phase focused much more explicitly on the need to regulate markets and to improve the income distributional profile through active interventionism, though within specified budgetary limits and constrained by the broad contours of the neoliberal paradigm.²

During this age of the post-Washington Consensus Latin America has been marked by a pronounced leftist-populist turn.³ The literature on Latin America has focused on different variants of this pronounced shift and has tried to classify it in terms of the softer, more market-friendly version associated with the Kirchners in Argentina or Lula in Brazil versus the more radical version often identified with Venezuela under Chávez.⁴ What is interesting, however, is that the shifts or reversals of neoliberalism

are not unique to Latin America, but are also visible in other parts of the emerging world. In this context, the Turkish experience during the incumbency of R. Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) constitutes a striking case for comparison with the soft versions of the leftist-populist turn in Latin America.

We argue that high public discontent accompanying the difficulties and crises associated with the policies of the Washington Consensus has generated a variety of populist responses in the global south. While the literature on populism is rich on specifying the characteristics of populist movements that distinguish them from non-populist ones, much less attention has been paid to distinguishing between different types of populist movements.⁵ Our central objective is to understand and classify these populist responses and highlight elements of divergence as well convergence by focusing on the cases of Argentina and Turkey. We consider Argentina under the incumbency of Néstor Kirchner (2003–07) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007 to present) and Turkey under Erdoğan (2002 to present) as prototype examples of left-of-center and right-of-center populism, respectively. Beyond identifying divergent strands of populism in two national contexts, we also explain the mix of domestic and external factors that accounts for this contrasting pattern.

Erdoğan and the Kirchners as Populists

Following Robert R. Barr, we define populism as “a mass movement led by an outsider or maverick seeking to gain or maintain power by using anti-establishment appeals and plebiscitarian linkages.”⁶ This minimal definition of populism is particularly appealing because it eschews from conflating populism with closely related but distinct concepts such as opportunism and demagoguery and does not link it with particular economic policies, socioeconomic structure, or social constituency.⁷ Populists could target different constituencies in different contexts, for example, depending on “where the construction of the ‘us versus them’ conflict will most likely take hold.”⁸ Thus, targeting a particular constituency cannot be a core component of populism. Similarly, charismatic leadership is a valuable asset for mobilizing masses not just for populists but for any political movement. The proposed definition also refrains from associating populism with any specific organizational form while the emphasis on plebiscitarian linkages suggests an absence of autonomy within the organizational structure of the populist movement.

The definition that we adopt emphasizes three aspects of the populist phenomenon. First, populist politicians frequently employ rhetorical appeals against the power elite, referred to as anti-establishment politics. Such appeals are especially attractive for mass mobilization during times of crises and seek to convey a view of society “where ‘the people’ (commoners) are pitted against the power elite.”⁹ Second, in order for a politician's claim of being the people's voice against the entrenched power elite to be credible, he or she must be considered either an outsider to the political establishment (i.e., an independent politician or someone associated with a newly competitive party) or a “maverick” (i.e., a politician associated with an established

party who then either abandons or thoroughly transforms it). The final defining aspect of populism is its emphasis on plebiscitary linkages between the political actors and the citizens where the latter do not have a meaningful control over the political processes or party platforms and are frequently left with “take it or leave it” choices.

While we employ a strictly political definition of populism to distinguish populists from non-populists, we focus on economic policies in order to identify different strands of populism. Populist leaders typically rise to power following severe economic crises, and their tenure and legacy are oftentimes characterized by their economic policies, which vary substantially (e.g., Juan Perón (1946–55) and Carlos Menem (1989–99) in Argentina). We exploit this variance in economic policies, specifically along the left-right dimension that we elaborate later, as a differentiating factor between different populist movements. The benefits of such an approach have been acknowledged in the literature. Kurt Weyland, for example, highlights that an “economic definition of populism is confusing for political analysis,” and populism should be situated in “the sphere of domination, not distribution.”¹⁰ At the same time, he suggests that economic policies as instruments for gaining and exercising power might help to distinguish different populist movements. Similarly, Cristóbal R. Kaltwasser notes that a minimal definition of populism establishes a “lowest common denominator” around the core features of populism that facilitates cross-regional research and identification of its subtypes.¹¹ As an example of the importance of economic policies for delineating different populist movements, he stresses that the European right-wing populism is distinguished primarily by a neoliberal economic program.¹²

In order to designate a government or political movement as populist, then, the three aspects of the populist phenomenon highlighted by Barr—leadership by an outsider or a maverick, heavy use of anti-establishment appeals, and emphasis on plebiscitarian linkages—must apply. From this perspective, we argue that the political movement of *kirchnerismo* embodied by the successive Kirchner governments in Argentina can be safely labeled as populist. First, even though the candidacy of Néstor Kirchner during the 2003 presidential election was endorsed by the Peronist interim President Eduardo Duhalde, as the governor of a small Patagonian province he was little known to the public.¹³ This marginal character of the Kirchner name, especially in comparison to the other well-known political figures of the day, allowed him to present himself as an outsider and resonated well with the public spirit against the political establishment following the 2001–02 crisis, incarnated in the popular slogan of “*¡Que se vayan todos!*” (“All of them must go!”).¹⁴ Moreover, during the 1990s Néstor Kirchner repeatedly clashed with and distanced himself from the leading Peronist figures by forming *Corriente Peronista*, an initiative that attracted Peronist leaders who questioned Menem’s neoliberal model.¹⁵ The ascent of Cristina Kirchner to the presidency in 2007, on the other hand, did not result from intra-party competition but was all but certain when her then highly popular husband announced that he would not seek a re-election and supported her candidacy.

Second, the ability of the Kirchners to present themselves outside of the Peronist establishment allowed them to credibly use anti-establishment appeals, which they

employed extensively. Néstor Kirchner tried to establish himself as the leader of “*el pueblo argentino*” (“the Argentine people”) and articulated a discourse contrasting “the people” and “its enemies” who were embodied by, among others, *Menemismo*, the IMF, international creditors of the Argentine debt, the multinational oil corporations, and the mainstream media.¹⁶ Cristina Kirchner closely followed this discourse; during the conflict between her government and the agricultural sector in 2008 following her decision to raise export taxes, she accused the dissident farmers of “a hidden coup attempt” (“*se esconde un intento golpista*”) accompanied by some media “generals” (“*acompañados por algunos ‘generales’ multimediáticos*”). In turn, she pleaded that she “needed the strength of the Argentine people” (“*necesito la fuerza del pueblo argentino*”) to “defend Argentina” (“*defender a la Argentina*”).¹⁷

Finally, the tenures of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner also display the third characteristic of the populist rule, namely the emphasis on plebiscitary linkages between “the people” and the ruler, as they greatly increased executive power at the expense of other institutions. Steven Levitsky and M. Victoria Murillo note that Néstor Kirchner “governed at the margins of Congress and other institutions of horizontal accountability” and encroached on judicial independence.¹⁸ As an indicator of executive power concentration, Néstor Kirchner signed a total of 270 decrees of necessity and urgency (DNU), in effect assuming powers which belong to the Congress.¹⁹ With an average of sixty DNUs per year, he remains the Argentine president who used this prerogative most frequently. Both Néstor and Cristina Kirchner rarely talked to reporters or gave press conferences during their tenures; Cristina Kirchner closed her presidential campaign of 2011 without giving a single interview and was reported not to hold Cabinet meetings anymore.²⁰ In a recent dispute regarding a new media law, she criticized the judiciary and asserted that the Supreme Court should “respect the popular will” (“*respete la voluntad popular*”), again emphasizing the supremacy of vertical accountability.²¹

The tenure of Erdoğan as the Prime Minister of three consecutive AKP governments in Turkey displays the characteristics of populist rule as well. Before his rise to power Erdoğan could credibly claim to be both an outsider to the political establishment of the time and a maverick within the political movement with which he was associated. He was outside the mainstream political community during the crises-ridden 1990s and became known to the public only after being elected as the mayor of Istanbul with 25 percent of the votes in a very tight race. During his tenure he got a reputation for being a competent service provider, and his popularity began to cause unease among the political and bureaucratic elite.²² In 1998 he was given a ten month prison sentence and was banned from politics on the grounds of provoking public conflict by reciting a poem with militant Islamist tones. This sentence not only helped to reinforce his outsider status but also allowed him to present himself as a victim of the political establishment. Erdoğan began to distance himself from the then mainstream Islamist movement (*Milli Görüş*) in the aftermath of the 1997 military memorandum against the government and assumed a leadership position in a new political faction that culminated in the AKP.²³

The frequent use of anti-establishment appeals and a discourse contrasting “the people” and “the elite” as characteristics of populist rule is especially salient in

the case of Erdoğan. He frequently refers to his humble socio-economic background and tries to depict himself as a “man of the people.” Here the contrast is with the “Republican elites” who are disconnected from popular values.²⁴ This dichotomy is articulated quite succinctly by Erdoğan himself:

My story is the story of this people. Either the people will win and come to power, or the pretentious and oppressive minority—estranged from the reality of Anatolia and looking over it with disdain—will remain in power. The authority to decide on this belongs to the people. Enough is enough, sovereignty belongs to the people!²⁵

This characterization of Turkish politics as a struggle between “the people” and “the elite” resonates well with a plebiscitary view of democracy and a concomitant disdain for institutions of horizontal accountability. In the eyes of Erdoğan, it is precisely these institutions of “the political establishment,” such as the Constitutional Court and the High Judiciary, that “formed an alliance to prevent people from achieving power.”²⁶ Accordingly, he and the AKP leadership have embraced a strictly majoritarian understanding of democracy whereby democracy is equated with popular will, and only majorities in the ballot box epitomize “the will of the nation.”²⁷ This view permeates the discourse of Erdoğan, e.g., “the degree of one’s power solely relies on the number of votes received from the people. A minority should not overpower the majority.”²⁸ As he continues to win elections, he is facing fewer checks and balances, and analysts have increasingly begun referring to Turkey as “Erdoğan’s Turkey.”²⁹ It should also not come as a surprise that most observers point out the diminishing intra-party democracy within the AKP, where Erdoğan increasingly appears to be the sole decision-maker.³⁰

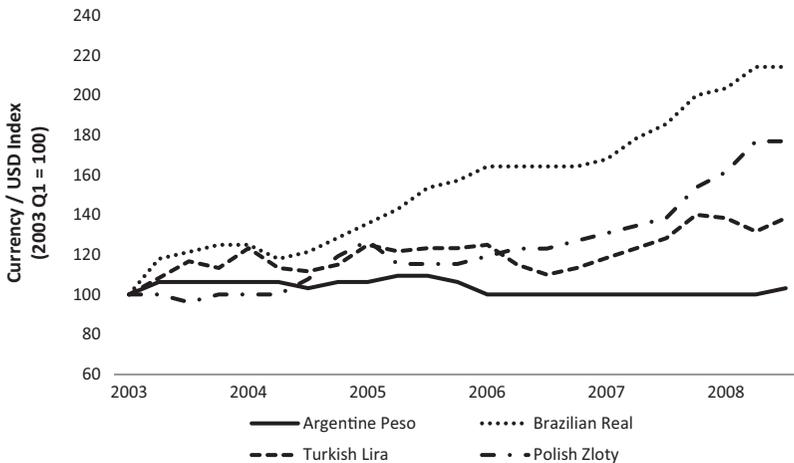
Divergence within the Populist Pattern of Rule

By employing a minimalist definition, we showed that both the Kirchner governments in Argentina and the Erdoğan governments in Turkey display the core characteristics of populism. Despite sharing a distinctly populist pattern of rule, however, a close analysis of the Kirchner and Erdoğan governments’ policies reveals that the two cases represent quite different strands of populism. Specifically, we argue that while the Kirchner governments characterize a left-wing type of populism, the Erdoğan governments’ policies suggest right-wing populism. To clarify our characterization of left-wing versus right-wing typologies, following Steven Levitsky and Kenneth M. Roberts, we designate “political actors who seek, as a *central programmatic objective*, to reduce social and economic inequalities” as left-wing.³¹ Such actors increase state expenditures, extend the coverage of social programs, put emphasis on employment, and frequently intervene in the labor market to expand workers’ benefits and rights.³² Right-wing political actors, on the other hand, do not place redistributive policies and social equality at the top of their programmatic agenda; instead, they prioritize economic stability and physical security.

In the case of Argentina, we argue that the three features that give Kirchners' policies a left-wing populist character are (1) emphasis on a competitive real exchange rate to support domestic industry and employment, (2) support for labor, and (3) frequent and substantial state interventions in the economy through regulations, subsidies, social programs, and nationalization. It should be noted that the fundamentals of Kirchners' macroeconomic policies were put in place during the interim presidency of Eduardo Duhalde (2002–03) who rejected orthodox stabilization programs and abandoned convertibility.³³ Thus, the reform process in post-crisis Argentina was well under way, and the worst part of the crisis had already passed when Néstor Kirchner, who had campaigned on a clearly anti-neoliberal program, was elected as the president in May 2003. Still, during his and his successor Cristina Kirchner's terms, the state began to take a bigger and more active role in the economy in line with a left-wing agenda.³⁴

One of the main factors behind the rapid growth of the Argentine economy under the Kirchners was the official policy aimed at preserving a stable and competitive real exchange rate (SCRER) through controls and interventions in the foreign exchange (FX) market.³⁵ The exchange rate proved a critical tool of government policy during this period. The central bank frequently intervened in the FX market to prevent the peso from appreciating in value, and purchased nearly forty-five billion US dollars from the market during the tenure of Néstor Kirchner. Additionally, the government introduced controls on the capital account in 2005. As a result, while most emerging market currencies significantly appreciated against the US dollar until the global crisis of 2008–09, the Argentine Peso diverged from this trend (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Argentine Peso, Brazilian Real, Turkish Lira, and Polish Zloty Indexed against the US Dollar, 2003–2008



Source: <http://www.oanda.com>.

The SCRER policy had significant positive effects on economic activity, employment, and external and fiscal accounts.³⁶ By effectively subsidizing and thus increasing the competitiveness of the domestic industry, the SCRER encouraged the expansion of industrial production, employment, and investment. Labor-intensive sectors disproportionately benefit from such a policy because a competitive parity favors labor-intensive activities and promotes the substitution of expensive inputs in favor of labor. Moreover, while the resulting expansion of the exports and positive trade surplus eased balance of payment concerns, the accumulation of international reserves by the central bank increased local confidence in the economy. The real exchange rate depreciation was the key factor in improving the trade balance, and Argentina recorded a 7.6 billion USD surplus in 2006 compared to a 14.5 billion USD deficit in 1998.³⁷

The SCRER combined with an expansionary monetary policy that emphasized growth facilitated the government's alliance with labor—the second feature of the Kirchners' economic policies. Upon taking power in May 2003, Néstor Kirchner was already courting the support of social groups that would share his anti-neoliberal critique, and he took a distinctly pro-labor stance in labor conflicts and collective bargaining.³⁸ The Kirchner governments did not quickly exercise their right to call for mandatory conciliation in labor conflicts to allow union protest and were reluctant to use force against labor demonstrations. In addition to tolerating and encouraging labor conflict, the Kirchner governments facilitated collective bargaining as well: while the annual average of finalized collective bargaining agreements stood at 176 for the period of 1991–02, it soared to 1083 during the period of 2003–11.³⁹ For the first time since the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s, the government directly intervened in wage policy by raising the minimum wage and stipulating wage increases in the private sector. As a result, both the real average wage and real minimum wage in Argentina took off during the Kirchner governments (Figure 2).

The third characteristic of the Kirchners' economic policies that suggests a left-wing type of populism is the frequent use of state interventions in the economy in the form of regulations, subsidies, social programs, and nationalization. Economic recovery of Argentina is accompanied by inflationary pressures, and the Kirchners' approach to address this problem has been the introduction of ad hoc policies such as periodic limitations on exports and negotiations with supermarkets and producers for "voluntary" price controls.⁴⁰ Additionally, the Kirchners have introduced extensive subsidies on a wide range of public services and wage goods.⁴¹ Néstor Kirchner significantly expanded the scope of the utility rate freezes and subsidy programs first implemented by Duhalde. Between 2003 and 2006 government spending on energy and fuels increased sevenfold, while transportation expenditures more than tripled. By 2010, federal spending on utilities subsidies reached 7.5 billion US dollars, around 10 percent of the budget.⁴² Finally, the Kirchner governments compensated food producers for part of their costs to control domestic prices of wage goods like beef and wheat.⁴³

The scope of the social transfers, services, and pensions were expanded significantly during the Kirchner administrations.⁴⁴ Néstor Kirchner extended pension coverage to the

Figure 2 Real Minimum and Average Wages in Argentina and Turkey, 2002–2010

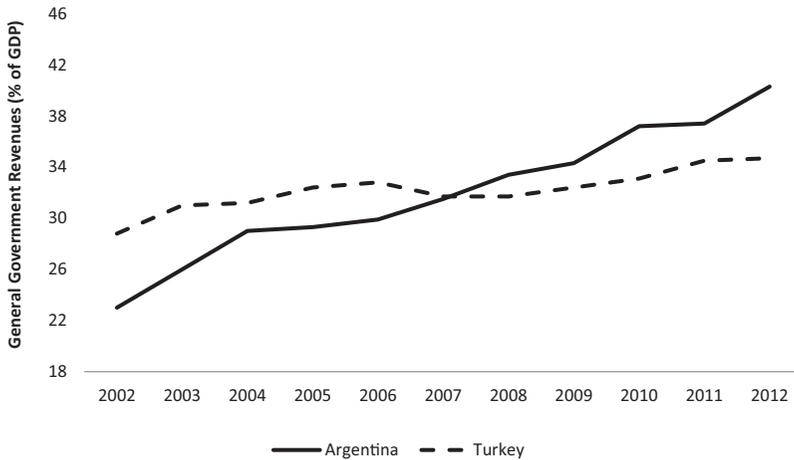


Note: Real average wages reflect wages for private sector workers in both countries.
 Sources: ECLAC, *Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean: 2010–2011* (Santiago, Chile: United Nations, 2011); Ministry of Development of Turkey, <http://www.mod.gov.tr>.

previously unprotected workers outside the formal labor market, and by the end of his term the pension system was virtually universal. In 2009 Cristina Kirchner expanded the existing universal family allowances by establishing the Universal Child Subsidy and a conditional cash transfer program that covered 30 percent of the population under the age of eighteen. Upon her re-election in 2011, she announced that she would continue to deepen redistributive policies. The Kirchners also engaged in a substantial nationalization effort of state-owned enterprises that were privatized in the 1990s.⁴⁵ While Néstor Kirchner nationalized the main water utility company and the national post office, Cristina Kirchner nationalized the private pension system, the main national airline, and the nation’s largest oil company. All these policies steadily and significantly increased the revenue requirements of the government: while in 2002 general government revenues constituted 23 percent of GDP, they almost doubled to 40 percent by 2012 (Figure 3).

In parallel to Argentina, the year 2001 marked a critical juncture in the Turkish political economy as well. The February 2001 economic crisis resulted in one of the deepest economic recessions in Turkey’s history and hit all segments of the society.⁴⁶ Perhaps ironically, it was this very depth and breadth of the crisis that ushered in a new round of structural reforms aimed at addressing some enduring institutional weaknesses of Turkish capitalism. The crisis broke the resistance of the ruling coalition government against an ambitious reform program backed by the IMF and created a pro-regulation momentum.⁴⁷ When voters punished the existing political elite by

Figure 3 General Government Revenues (% of GDP) in Argentina and Turkey, 2002–2012



Source: IMF World Economic Outlook Database, April 2013.

throwing all the parties in the coalition government out of the parliament and bringing Erdoğan's AKP to power in November 2002, the positive effects of the program were already palpable: the economy had grown by 6.2 percent in 2002, inflation was trending sharply downward, fiscal balances were fast improving, and interest rates were declining.

Just as Néstor Kirchner of Argentina followed the policy fundamentals of Duhalde, Erdoğan pragmatically chose to commit himself to this inherited reform drive; however, the direction of the economic policies was quite different. In contrast to the left-wing character of the Kirchners' policies, we argue that Erdoğan's policies suggest a right-wing strand of populism because of (1) the retreat of the state to a primarily regulatory function, (2) the emphasis on pro-capital policies and a general neglect of labor interests, and (3) a rather reactive and conservative macroeconomic policy-making. We should stress that by characterizing the Erdoğan governments as right-wing we do not imply that they refrained from redistributive policies completely or that the poor segments of the Turkish society did not benefit from economic growth. Rather, the AKP's approach to redistribution emphasizes private charity, informal networks, and conditional cash transfers as preferred mechanisms, and centers around "helping the poor" without a focus on systematic income redistribution — not unlike many Christian Democratic parties in Europe.⁴⁸

While the state assumed a significant role in the political economy of Argentina after the 2001 crisis, in the Turkish case we observe a retreat of the state to a regulatory role in line with the principles of "regulatory neoliberalism."⁴⁹ This move

entailed taking the control of economic assets and decision making away from publicly elected bodies by forming autonomous regulatory organizations for the management of key sectors of the economy and privatizing state-owned enterprises (SOEs).⁵⁰ While privatization was on Turkey's economic agenda since the mid-1980s, its pace had been extremely slow until the early 2000s.⁵¹ Erdoğan was determined to reinvigorate the privatization efforts and more than 20 billion US dollars were raised in privatization revenues from 2005 to 2007 alone, an amount that is more than double of what had been raised during the previous sixteen years. The privatized SOEs included companies in the infrastructure industries such as telecommunications, electricity distribution, highways, and ports.⁵² As a result, while in 2002 the SOEs employed close to 400 thousand people, this figure dropped to 170 thousand by 2011.⁵³

The second characteristic of Erdoğan's rule that suggests a right-wing type of populism is its emphasis on pro-capital policies and a relative neglect of labor's demands and concerns. The AKP governments dismantled administrative barriers to investment, reduced the corporate tax rate, and improved the overall legal protection of foreign investors.⁵⁴ The party's 2002 election manifesto declared that one of its aims would be to make Turkey "an international brand [for investors]," and the government boasts that it brought the number of days required to start a business down from thirty-eight to nine, well below the OECD average of twenty-five days.⁵⁵ The new foreign direct investment (FDI) regime included important incentives such as easy access to real estate, guarantees to transfer proceeds, and no minimum capital requirement.⁵⁶ As a result of these pro-capital policies, as well as a favorable economic and political environment, FDI inflows to Turkey reached a record level of 51.6 billion US dollars between 2005 and 2007, while they amounted to less than 1 billion US dollars annually before 2004.⁵⁷ Overall, the big business in Turkey, represented under the umbrella of the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TUSIAD), had been quite satisfied with Erdoğan's economic policies, especially during his first term.⁵⁸

In contrast, the AKP governments' stance towards labor interests has been much less favorable. Just six months after Erdoğan's inauguration, a new labor law (No. 4857) was adopted that was heavily criticized by the labor unions for sanctioning temporary and flexible employment. In several cases the government remained silent on employers' disregard for workers' right to unionize, and "the postponement of legal strikes has been a telling feature of Turkish industrial relations under the [Erdoğan] government."⁵⁹ The number of strikes steadily decreased during this period; there were just nine strikes in 2011 compared to twenty-seven when AKP took office in 2002.⁶⁰ In addition to this overall deterioration in the institutional rights of the working class, real wage increases in Turkey have been quite modest during Erdoğan's tenure, especially when compared to increases in Argentina (Figure 2).

Conservative and rather reactive macroeconomic policy-making is the third characteristic of Erdoğan's policies that point to right-wing populism. The AKP governments were committed to fiscal discipline and tight monetary policies as demanded by the

IMF, especially until the 2008–09 global financial crisis. The public sector’s primary surplus averaged 4.7 percent of GDP over the period of 2003–07, and, unlike in Argentina, general government revenues as a percentage of GDP remained quite stagnant (Figure 3). Even during the height of the 2008–09 crisis, the AKP government refrained from sizeable stimulus packages and other interventionist measures observed in many emerging economies.⁶¹ In contrast to the SCRER policy of the Kirchner governments, Turkish authorities allowed the Turkish Lira to appreciate by implementing an anti-inflationary policy of strong currency via high real interest rates.⁶² This appreciation in turn contributed to the increase in the share of imported inputs in industrial production from an average of 15–20 percent in the late 1990s to an average of 35–40 percent in the mid-2000s, and, while the average current account deficit stood at 0.55 percent of GDP between 1990 and 2002, it jumped to 5.2 percent of GDP for the period 2003–11.⁶³

In sum, while it is appropriate to characterize both the Kirchner and Erdoğan governments as populist, a closer look at their policies suggests that they represent different types of populism, namely a left-wing type in the case of the Kirchners and a right-wing type in the case of Erdoğan. In Argentina, a combination of strategies, including a competitive exchange rate and frequent state interventions in the economy in the form of regulations, subsidies, social programs, and nationalization, significantly increased the redistributive capacity of the state and strengthened traditional industrial sectors. In contrast, in Turkey the monetary and fiscal policy regime of the AKP governments prioritized the interests of capital, and the state retreated to a mainly regulatory function. Additionally, a politically mobilized labor movement was a key component of the Kirchners’ populist coalition, while the AKP governments were characterized by a conspicuous neglect of labor’s interests.

Factors behind the Divergence

What accounts for the Kirchner and Erdoğan governments’ divergent paths within the populist pattern of rule? We argue that four factors are essential for understanding why the Erdoğan governments followed a right-wing strand of populism while the Kirchner governments had a strongly left-wing tone. These factors are (1) the perceptions of the causes of previous economic policies’ failure that culminated in the crises of 2001–02 in both countries, (2) integration patterns into the international economy, (3) the strength of labor, and (4) regional dynamics.

In Turkey the responsibility for the policies that led to the collapse of the economy in 2001 was attributed to domestic political actors. The country had experienced a series of “boom and bust” cycles during the 1990s, when weak coalition governments pursued hot-money policies of high real interest rates to attract short-term capital in order to finance bloating government expenditures.⁶⁴ The results of these policies were “large fiscal deficits, chronically high rates of inflation, an unsustainable balance

of payments situation, falling international reserves, and the inevitable encounter with the IMF.”⁶⁵ Accordingly, the economic crises in Turkey were typically domestically generated, where the fiscal crisis of the state as a result of reckless spending by the governments played a central role. In turn, external actors such as the IMF and the World Bank frequently intervened in the economy to restore equilibrium, since the domestic actors were unable to do so.⁶⁶

The systematic collapse of 2001 was just the most severe of the busts that Turkey experienced repeatedly during the 1990s. The depth of the 2001 crisis and the perceived lack of will and capacity of the political actors to impose fiscal discipline for sustained economic growth changed the balance of power in Turkey in favor of transnational and domestic actors advocating liberalization with regulatory reforms.⁶⁷ The IMF (in addition to the EU) emerged as a powerful external anchor for fundamental fiscal and institutional reforms to achieve macroeconomic stability and a clean break with the previous era.⁶⁸ Thus, in Turkey the perception of domestic responsibility for past economic crises facilitated the Erdoğan governments’ implementation of policies that emphasized retreat of the state to a regulatory function and conservative macroeconomic policy-making.

In contrast, in Argentina the blame for the crisis was directed primarily towards the external actors who were influential in the design and implementation of the policies during the 1990s. Argentina had emerged as a “neoliberal success story” during the early 1990s, and the policies implemented during this period were designed in close collaboration with the IMF.⁶⁹ Upon assuming the presidency in 1987, Carlos Menem engaged in a series of neoliberal reforms encompassing trade and financial liberalization, a massive privatization program including social security and public utilities, and deregulation of the labor market. Additionally, he implemented a fixed exchange rate regime to combat hyperinflation and to impose a strict monetary and fiscal policy (the Convertibility Plan). The structural reforms of this period were supported by the international financial institutions and the U.S. Treasury, and both then Minister of Economy Domingo Cavallo and Menem were “darlings of the IMF.”⁷⁰

While the neoliberal reforms were quite successful and popular in the short term, they proved to be fateful for the disastrous crisis of 2001.⁷¹ Unlike Turkey, in Argentina the perception was that the primary responsibility for the economic failure that culminated in the 2001 crisis rested with the international financial institutions that had strongly supported the neoliberal reforms. The economic crisis was accompanied by a massive wave of protests, in which the IMF was a major target along with the government. This sentiment is also shared by the IMF itself as its then First Deputy Managing Director Anne Krueger remarked that “[Argentina] faithfully applied many of the lessons that we thought we had learned from the previous crises of the mid and late 1990s—but a combination of new mistakes and some old ones brought it to grief all the same.”⁷² Thus, in the post-crisis Argentina neoliberal policies of the previous decade were discredited, and this disrepute empowered the subsequent Kirchner governments to adopt leftist policies.

The second factor that led to a divergence in policies is the countries' distinct integration patterns into the international markets in the post-2002 global economic environment. The period from 2002 until the financial crisis of 2008–09 was characterized by exceptionally favorable conditions with record capital and trade flows, low interest rates, and strong demand for emerging market assets. Historically, Turkey's growth episodes have almost always been financed by capital inflows, and thus the AKP government had strong incentives to pursue pro-capital policies for attracting foreign capital to finance the credit-financed, domestic demand-driven growth.⁷³ During this period Turkey offered one of the highest real interest rates among the emerging markets, and the cumulative portfolio investment of foreigners exceeded 100 billion US dollars as of 2007 compared to just 10 billion at the beginning of 2003.⁷⁴ The widening current account deficit, which rose from 2.5 percent of GDP in 2003 to 9.9 percent of GDP in 2011, rendered the Turkish economy quite vulnerable to shifts in global market sentiments, and the AKP government pursued orthodox monetary/fiscal and pro-capital policies to ensure the continuation of capital flows.⁷⁵

In contrast to Turkey, Argentina's growth during this period was not dependent on capital flows, and this absence of external constraints was a historically rare occurrence.⁷⁶ The single most important impact of the international economy on Argentina during the Kirchner governments was the global boom in commodity prices that began around 2003.⁷⁷ As one of the world's major agricultural producers, Argentina's receipts from agricultural exports—which accounted for over half of Argentina's total merchandise exports—soared to 45 billion US dollars in 2011 from 12 billion in 2002.⁷⁸ The Kirchner governments exploited this situation judiciously by undervaluing the exchange rate to promote agricultural exports and then heavily taxing them to raise revenue.⁷⁹ As a result, taxes on exports alone accounted for 63 percent of the federal administration's primary surplus of 3.5 percent of GDP in 2006, and the primary balance of the federal administration averaged 2.6 percent of the GDP for the period 2003–08.⁸⁰ Crucially, Argentina consistently recorded current account surpluses during this period, which eased its dependence on capital flows and reduced the risks of expansionist monetary policies.⁸¹ As a result, the Kirchner governments did not need to court international capital to promote growth, and the receipts from the commodity taxes facilitated the increase in state expenditures to pursue left-wing policies.

The difference in labor movements' strength in the two countries when Erdoğan and Kirchner came to power is the third factor explaining the divergent policy paths. The Turkish labor movement is historically characterized as weak, dispersed, and dominated by the state.⁸² It also lacks a political ideology equivalent to Peronism in Argentina that identifies itself with the working class. The military coup of 1980, which initiated a neoliberal restructuring program, dealt an additional blow to labor: strikes were forbidden, social rights abolished, collective agreements suspended, and many unions were disbanded (Laws 2821 and 2822). The subsequent 1982 Constitution made it harder for workers to become unionized, increased the state's political and financial influence on the unions, put a number of limitations on strikes, and prohibited the unions to participate in political activities. Accordingly, Erdoğan faced

no incentives to pursue pro-labor policies and to ally himself with labor. The declining political clout of the Turkish labor movement is reflected in union membership numbers as well: while there were 2.5 million unionized workers in 1980, by 2010 that number dropped to 650 thousand.⁸³

Even though Argentina experienced a radical economic liberalization period in the 1990s, unions were able to maintain their associational power.⁸⁴ Labor unions were an important constituency of the governing Peronist Party that implemented the market reforms in the 1990s, and they were able to obtain important concessions that preserved their institutional resources. The unions prevented major changes to collective labor laws, retained monopoly of representation at the shop floor and the collective rights of centralized wage bargaining. Furthermore, sectors that boomed in this period were highly unionized. Thus, although the market reforms of the 1990s undoubtedly weakened the Argentine labor movement, the unions were able to hold on to important institutional resources that “could be called on in the immediate context of economic recovery and a friendlier government” when Néstor Kirchner took power.⁸⁵ The strength of the labor movement motivated Kirchner governments to court their support and facilitated the implementation of left-wing policies. This strategy returned significant political dividends. When Néstor Kirchner called for a large demonstration to mark his third year in power, for example, the unions were among the main actors in the street demonstrations.⁸⁶ Similarly, during Cristina Kirchner’s conflict with the agricultural sector, the unions were again on the streets to support the government.⁸⁷

Finally, we argue that regional dynamics were instrumental for the divergent policy paths as well. In Turkey, the post-crisis IMF program was legitimized and justified by convergence to the European Union (EU) policy framework. Kemal Derviş, the then Minister of Economy, had emphasized that “the economic program is prepared in full compliance with the National Program to the EU. . . . Indeed, our economic program represents the economic dimension of the National Program to the EU.”⁸⁸ Moreover, in the post-9/11 global environment, the US foreign policy was increasingly orientated towards the Middle East, and the stability of Turkey in the region was an important consideration.⁸⁹ The IMF was willing to lend several multiples of Turkey’s quota at the Fund and provided favorable repayment conditions to facilitate the reform process.

The Kirchner governments’ tenure, on the other hand, coincided with the rise of leftist-populist parties throughout Latin America.⁹⁰ Commodity exports during this period provided the Latin American governments with the hard currency they needed for expansionist and redistributive policies and reduced their dependency on the international financial institutions. Karen L. Remmer reports that the odds of electing a leftist-populist president in the region was positively associated with improvements in the terms of trade, supporting the argument that decreased dependence on capital flows enabled the implementation of left-wing policies.⁹¹ The region-wide shift towards leftist rule bestowed further legitimacy to the Kirchners’ left-wing policies, and it also facilitated their desire to strengthen Argentina’s position vis-à-vis the international institutions through closer relations with other Latin American countries.⁹²

Conclusion

Our emphasis in the present article has been on highlighting and accounting for divergent trajectories of the populist practice in two major emerging democracies. We contend that both the Kirchner governments of Argentina and the Erdoğan governments of Turkey closely fit to the populist pattern of rule, yet their policies point to a left-wing type of populism in Argentina and a right-wing type in Turkey. A mix of domestic and external factors was crucial for this differentiation. Specifically, we stress the importance of the legacy of failed economic policies preceding the rise of populist leaders, distinct integration patterns into the global economy, the strength of labor, and regional dynamics that legitimized certain policy trajectories. While much of the literature on populism has focused on Latin American cases, we introduce a cross-regional dimension to the study of populism, a framework which could be useful for evaluating different populist patterns of rule elsewhere.

We should not assume that the left- or right-wing versions of populism depicted in the present study are necessarily stable. A major challenge to the populist equilibrium concerns the question of sustainability. In Turkey, the Erdoğan governments clearly benefited from large-scale capital inflows, especially during the favorable global liquidity environment between 2002 and 2008. The interruption of these inflows during the crisis of 2008–09, however, dealt a serious blow to the Turkish economy and to the support for the AKP government. The economy contracted by a startling rate of 14.7 percent in the first quarter of 2009, and, in the March 2009 local elections, AKP registered one of its lowest levels of support during its ten-year rule. While capital inflows resumed in the aftermath of the crisis, the continuation of this pattern of growth is not assured given the precarious condition of the global economy. Indeed, there are signs that Turkey's externally driven growth pattern is reaching its limits, and the country may be entering into a new phase of slow growth. The example of the 2009 local elections suggests that a protracted period of slow growth may present serious challenges to AKP for maintaining its broad-based electoral coalition.

A similar challenge is faced by Argentina whose populist model has also been dependent on favorable external conditions, notably on the revenues generated by commodity exports. A change in world market conditions, such as a major commodities slump, would significantly weaken the foundations of redistributing income, a key element of the Argentine left-wing populism. Cristina Kirchner has already had to significantly curb public spending by reducing utilities subsidies and discretionary transfers to provinces and municipalities.⁹³ Additionally, chronically high inflation has become a major issue—unofficial estimates put it at around 25 percent as of 2012.⁹⁴ In response, Cristina Kirchner asked unions to hold back calls for higher wages and to stage fewer strikes; yet, union leaders rejected such appeals, and, by the end of November 2012, Kirchner faced the first general strike of her term.⁹⁵ An anti-government march, the largest since Néstor Kirchner took office in 2003, took place in the most important urban centers of several provinces in September 2012, followed by an even bigger one in early November.⁹⁶ The distancing of labor and

growing public discontent with government policies suggest that the sustainability of *kirchnerismo* is all but certain.

Yet another challenge concerns the democratic deficits associated with both versions of populism. The plebiscitarian view of democracy and the accompanying disdain for institutions of horizontal accountability that is evident in the Turkish and Argentine cases do not bode well for a genuinely pluralistic, liberal democratic order. Instead, they fit Guillermo O'Donnell's model of "delegative democracy," characterized by an elected executive who considers himself as entitled to govern as he sees fit.⁹⁷ Both the Erdoğan and Kirchner governments, especially during their latest phases of rule, have been increasingly criticized for authoritarian tendencies, most notably in the realms of the freedom of the press, judicial processes, excessive concentration of power in the executive, and a lack of tolerance for the opposition.⁹⁸ These observations suggest that while the left- and right-wing versions of populism may follow quite different trajectories in terms of their substantive policies, they are confronted with similar challenges of sustainability and over-centralization of power.

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