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## ACTIVISTS VS. POPULISTS

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Society members experience various issues, which might require conflicting approaches. Essentially, populism, a political approach, may be required to fight for the recognition of some groups by the oppressive groups. Alternatively, activism, a social approach, may be required to solve such issues. Since populists and activists fight for change, their differences can be analyzed by considering the kind of support that they can access to achieve their goals, while similarities concern the fight for democratic participation of all citizens.

### **Differences**

Populists are associated with political and economic matters but are less concerned with social issues, while activists address all three kinds of needs. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, administrative populists in the Republic of Slovakia and the Czech Republic bypassed institutionalized and established response channels.<sup>1</sup> Populists believe that they have all methods to manage national and personal issues. Disregarding the already established political systems means that they are actively engaged in antagonism with the government. Therefore, populists directly influence decisions in the higher political domains.

On the contrary, while populists have their political systems to administer the changes that they desire within their communities, activists are more socially dependent. In particular, activists rely on social support to achieve their objectives.<sup>2</sup> Activism is a social affair where some members of society fight for the interests of others. Essentially, because activists do not compel community leaders to initiate changes to occur for their selfish gain, they depend on

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1. Lenka Bestikova and Pavol Babos, 'Best in Covid: Populists in the Time of Pandemic.' *Politics and Governance* 8, no. 4 (2020): 496, <https://doi.org/10.17645/pay.v8i4.3424>.

2. Maja Kutlaca, Martin van Zomeren, and Kai Eostude, 'Friends or Foes? How Activists and Non-Activists Perceive and Evaluate Each Other.' *PLOS ONE* 15, no. 4 (2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0230918>.

other members of society to seek the changes that they need from the most influential members. Unlike populists who can implement the changes that they desire because they have political power, activists achieve such changes through social power and mobilization. Therefore, populists depend on the political ability to influence changes, while activists depend on the social power to transform the communities they represent.

Additionally, populists are self-centered, while activists believe that all people are participants in the common social, economic, and political issues. For instance, activism involves a belief that all people's voices matter.<sup>3</sup> The mobilization of supporters of a particular course of protest by activists draws power from the people who are believed to be equally influential through their social support. Because activism is a collective responsibility, it requires society's input. However, populists politicize their activities to gain legitimacy.<sup>4</sup> Populist groups desire to be recognized politically. In contrast, activists want every person to be treated equally regardless of their differences. Thus, activists are selfless, while populists are egoistic as they seek recognition in the political realm.

### **Similarities**

Populists and activists represent a group of communities with which they are affiliated. Mainly, populism is similar to activism when the need for all citizens to be offered equal political governance opportunities is required.<sup>5</sup> Activism and populism become similar under

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3. John Eligon and Kimiko de Freytas-Tamura, 'Today's Activism: Spinyenous, Leaderless, but Not Without Aim.' *The New York Times*, 2020, par. 12, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/03/us/leaders-activists-george-floyd-protests.htm>.

4. Bestikova and Babos, 1.

5. Donald. T Critchlow. *In Defense of Populism: Protest and American Democracy* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 2.

circumstances where political oppression exists. When some community members desire to establish democracy, a desirable political agreement, activists fighting for its establishment work together with populists agitating for equal political participation of all citizens. Therefore, where politics is involved, especially when a democratic government is needed by most people, populists and political activists perform similar responsibilities in agitating for such changes.

In conclusion, the significant differences between populists and populists concern the scope of society needs they fight for, such as political, social, and economic demands. When populists fight for political recognition, activists agitate for social changes in their communities. Furthermore, while activists are selfless as they represent their communities, populists fight for interests that suit their political desires. However, both groups share a similarity where activists and populists fight against oppression, meaning that they share similar democratic values. While these differences and similarities exist, activists serve a more significant role in shaping societies to accommodate everyone.

## Bibliography

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