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EGPA2026 CONFERENCE

24-27 August Rome, Italy

CALL FOR PANELS



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EGPA Specialized Panel 7

‘Populism’ and its continuing implications and challenges for public administration governance and delivery of public services

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Panel topic description

This panel investigates the extent to which the era of populism will lead to a semi-permanent transformation or at least evolution in the way that public administration and services are governed and administered. Submissions are welcome which address the broad issues of populism and public administration.

Recent years have witnessed the emergence of ‘populism’ and ‘populist leaders’ and this has demanded a new response by public management. The USA, Brazil Italy and Hungary are clear examples of the phenomenon. The shelf life of populist leaders can be relatively short, as evidenced in the UK by the eviction of Boris Johnson from office.

The phenomenon of Trump in the USA suggests that ‘rules based’ systems whether international or national in nature can be subsumed by an authoritarian personality for whom such rules are both an impediment to be removed and indeed a challenge to be overcome. Public Administration in both its theoretical and practitioner guises has a reliance upon ‘rules’ which are observed until – through proper process – they are amended. But public administration without ‘rules and process’ is reminiscent of primitive forms of governance which are idiosyncratic and subject to the whims and wishes of an authoritarian ruler, whether it be in some feudal form or otherwise.

Looking back, *New Public Leadership* represented a response to a period of ‘austerity’ where those responsible for managing public services attempted to do more (or at least



the same) with squeezed financial resources. It was a development from the radicalism of an earlier time when *New Public Management* sought to re-cast the public sector from fat bureaucracies to efficient organisations modelled on a private sector ideal. The era of populism which has emerged in western democracies represents a different sort of challenge which invites a fresh appraisal of public services and the people who rely upon them most.

To understand this challenge, we adopted the concept of *New Public Populism* which is a departure in logic from *NPM* and *NPL* and which we develop further theoretically here. It represents a contradiction for the delivery of public services when the very citizens who need to be satisfied politically are in many cases also the most vulnerable and need to be cared for.

With this conceptual lens, we explore in this paper the continuing implications of a populist trend even when the populist leaders are defenestrated. The persistence of populism in public discourse (whether of the left or right) has implications for the creation of public policies and for the operational environment of public managers. We argue that it challenges the traditional concepts of public service value, neutrality and the rule of law.

Even in countries where populist leaders have been kept at bay or removed from office, disenchantment, social division and anti-elitism have given rise to simplistic answers and contradictory positions. Since populism is neither inherently logical nor rational, it is difficult to address in a coherent fashion. And yet public services are expected to tackle the broad array of social concerns which underpin the growth of populism. After all it is the most vulnerable in society who rely on health, social care and welfare, but they are also most likely to be part of the demographic which identifies with populist rhetoric and vote for populist politicians.

In developing further the concept of *New Public Populism* we argue that there is a permanent departure in logic from *NPM* and *NPL* that appears capable of outliving populist leaders. This represents a contradiction for the delivery of public services when the very citizens who need to be satisfied politically are in many cases also the most vulnerable and need to be cared for.

Panel format

We intend that the panel format will include submitted papers which will have nominated discussants. However, we also hope to organise a 'round table' discussion to encourage wider participation. As populism is a subject which has largely been the focus of



psychology and politics, we hope that the panel will identify how the public management and public administration research community might develop a particular perspective which brings to bear the particular agendas and issues which populism might present in our academic discipline.

Brief References

Burleigh, M., 2021. Populism: Before and after the Pandemic, Hurst.

Moynihan, D.P., 2022. Public Management for Populists: Trump's Schedule F Executive Order and the Future of the Civil Service. *Public Administration Review*, 82(1), pp.174-178.

Murdock, A. and Barber, S., 2020. Beyond Public Services: The Era of New Public Populism. In *Public Management and Vulnerability* (pp. 14-35). Routledge.



Practicalities

If you wish to present a paper in one of the Permanent Study Group's, Ad Hoc Group's, or Specialized Panel's sessions at the conference, please upload an abstract outlining your proposed conference paper. This may be done through the conference website.

Important dates

- Deadline for submission of abstracts: April 6, 2026
- Deadline for submission of EGPA Booster Grant applications: April 15, 2026
- Acceptance notification and opening of registrations: April 20, 2026
- Deadline for submission of EGPA Travel Grant applications: April 26, 2026
- Full paper submission deadline and registration deadline: July 19, 2026

Website

- <https://www.iias-iisa.org/egpa-2026-conference/>

Submission

- <https://www.conftool.org/egpa2026/>
- Unless specified otherwise, 500-words limit for abstracts

Contact

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