

POLÍTICA EXTERIOR POPULISTA DE IZQUIERDA: EL CASO DEL KIRCHNERISMO EN ARGENTINA

Resumen

Este artículo aborda el tema de la política exterior populista en Argentina y emplea una metodología de investigación de múltiples métodos que combina el análisis del discurso, el análisis de la política exterior y la reconstrucción política histórica del kirchnerismo. Teóricamente, nos referimos al populismo como un “enfoque ideacional” y consideramos las líneas temáticas de Destradi y Plegaman para investigar el populismo en la política mundial. A lo largo del artículo, sostenemos que la política exterior populista de izquierda no discrimina la cooperación internacional y la globalización per se, pero en una visión maniquea del mundo, crítica a los países occidentales ricos y propone la creación de nuevas alianzas regionales.

Palabras claves

Populismo, política exterior, Kirchnerismo, Relaciones Internacionales

Abstract

This article addresses the issue of populist foreign policy in Argentina and employs a multi-methods research that combines discourse analysis, foreign policy analysis, and historical political reconstruction of Kirchnerism. Theoretically, we refer to populism as an “Ideational Approach” and we consider Destradi and Plegaman’s thematic lines in order to investigate populism in world politics. Throughout the paper, we argue that left-wing populist foreign policy does not discriminate against international cooperation and globalization per se but in a Manichean vision of the world, it criticizes western rich countries, and proposes the creation of new regional alliances.

Keywords

Populism; Foreign Policy; Kirchnerism; International Relations.

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POPULIST LEFT-WING FOREIGN POLICY: THE CASE OF KIRCHNERISM IN ARGENTINA

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Introduction

Populism is not a new phenomenon. It has been associated with the malfunctioning of democracy and it has been perceived as the result of institutional weakness with reference to underdeveloped countries.

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Latin America has always been seen as a pioneer in the emergence of populism —understood either as “post-democracy” (Crouch, 2004) or “disfigured democracy” (Urbinati, 2014)—; in a nutshell, as “degeneration or pathology of democracy” (Anselmi, 2018). Despite it has mostly been a Latin American feature, populism became a global issue when it appeared in the consolidated democracies of the West, especially with the arrival of Donald Trump as president of the USA and Boris Johnson as British premier, right after the approval of Brexit. Further, the populist phenomenon has also spread in other European democracies. For instance, in Italy —with its Northern League-Five Star Movement—, in Hungary —with Orban’s political rule— and in Poland —with PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość Law and Justice)— its right-wing populist party. These premises demonstrate that populism has become a global phenomenon and it’s here to stay (Destradi & Plagemann, 2019). As in Anselmi (Anselmi, 2018, p. 1) it is impossible to dissociate reflection on contemporary democracy from consideration on the populist phenomenon: *“we are witnessing a social and political dynamic which started some decades ago, that appears periodically and is of a global nature, as it manifests itself in very different geographical contexts”*.

Thus, as populist movements rise to power, the implications on foreign policy and international relations —IR— became more relevant than ever, especially in Latin American countries “where populists have long held political power and have influenced foreign policy in practice” (Chryssogelos, 2017, p. 1). For instance, although early studies focused on explaining the emergence, little was said about the relationship between populism and foreign policy, or even between populism and IR (Destradi & Plagemann). Stengel (Stengel et al., 2019) asserted that, despite significant attention has been paid to the phenomenon, populism world politics remains underexplored, much to the detriment of both IR and populism itself.

Moreover, we make reference to Alan (Burrier, 2019) who did a systematic and in-depth analysis comparing foreign policies in 6 Latin American countries (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Peru, Nicaragua and El Salvador) during 3 decades and collated countries with extended histories of populism (the treatment group) with peer nations where populism has been notably absent (the control group), in spite of achieving “a balance between generalizability and depth”, the study had two conceptual limitations. The first refers to the definition of populism only as a political strategy, which makes it very difficult to identify a populist foreign policy. The second was only to work with



the classic variables of nationalism and protectionism, thus leaving aside—in our view—other variables that are also important for IR such as cooperation and conflict.

Furthermore, we consider the work of Daniel (Wajner, 2019) who studied the foreign policy of Latin American populist governments but compared the formulation of the foreign relations of the three great populist periods in the region: “classic populism” (1930s-1950s), “neo-liberal neo-populism” (Mudde), and “progressive neo-populism” (2000s). In this case, he compared periods trying to respond to “how these regimes conducted their foreign policies on the hemispheric, interregional, regional/sub-regional, and global/trans-national levels”. While expanding the study variables with respect to Burrier, it tells us little or nothing about what it understands by populism and how to identify a foreign policy as populist, although it does so in a systematic and cohesive way.

In relation to the criticism concerning unclear and not specific concept of populism, it should be added that most studies do not try to determine whether the foreign policy of a populist government is also a populist one. For instance, there is a lack in studies that focus on how existing characteristics of populism are elucidating the formulation and application of nation-states’ foreign policies.

Moreover, in their comparative research on Carlos Menem Argentinian foreign policy (1989-1999) —considered a right-wing populist government— and the one of Hugo Chávez (1999-2013) in Venezuela – classified as left-wing populist leader, Leslie and Cameron (Wehner & Thies, 2020, p. 2) argued that “a comparison of two cases of populisms can shed light on the type of international behaviour they seek to advance and discredit the notion that there is only one type of populist foreign policy”. Although the authors did a similar job to the one proposed here, they approached the study of foreign policy from the perspective of the role-played by populist leaders, mainly, at the international level.

For these reasons, the idea of the present work lies in the attempt to further develop the study carried out by Sandra and Johannes (Destradi & Plagemann, 2019) in the specific case of Argentina. Through an analysis of the discourse of the main Argentinian presidential speeches that are about foreign policy and world politics of the populist governments of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner 2003-2015, we aim at contributing to the analysis of the thematic lines present in the literature, but we want to highlight the reasons why we consider that their foreign policy was populist.



Our research aim and method

This paper aims to investigate if the Kirchnerist populist foreign policy follows the thematic lines identified by Sandra and Johannes (Destradi & Plagemann, 2019): a) More Conflict-Prone Bilateral Relations; b) A weakening of global governance and its institutions; c) A more centralized and personalized foreign policymaking; and d) the development of a new international partnership (i.e. UNASUR, ALBA) while weakening links to traditional western partners. In this sense, our main research question is how did the populist foreign policy under Kirchnerism follow the lines of Destradi and Plagemann? How populism comes to determine some of the foreign policy arguments of Kirchnerism? Therefore, to reach our point, we have to determinate first whether and why the Kirchnerism foreign policy was populist.

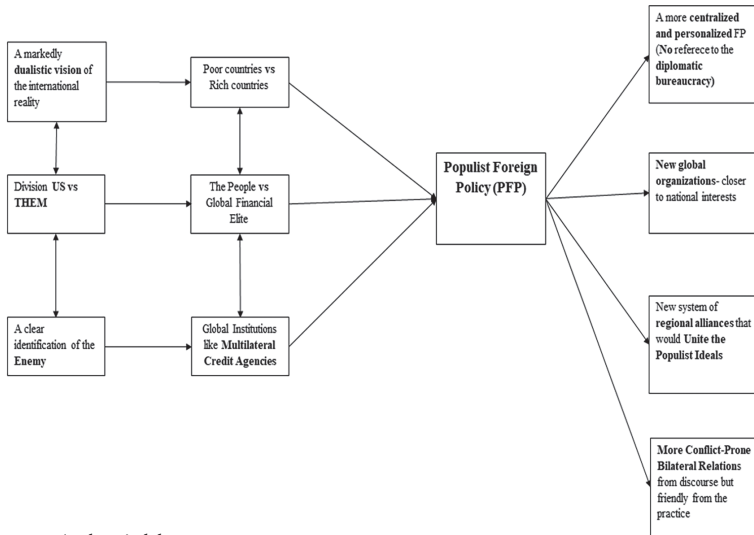
In order to fulfil our research goal, this article combines discourse and foreign policy analysis and historical political reconstruction of Kirchnerism (2003-2015) in Argentina. We consider discourse analysis in order to grasp a corpus of statements which, the presidents used as a form of engaging discontinuity over time and space and in terms of technology of power (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008; Foucault, 1981). Whereas, foreign policy analysis and historical political reconstructions serve the aim of adding context and qualitative, making sense of the discourses that ultimately led to specific foreign policies (Hudson & Day, 2019)

We decided to consider those thematic lines of Sandra and Johannes (Destradi & Plagemann, 2019) and in this study we argue that this model Fig. 1 explains how foreign policy decisions have worked during Kirchnerism in Argentina.



Figure. 1:

Populist Foreign Policy (PFF) in Argentina (2003- 2015): how foreign policy works in a left-wing populist regime



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Conceptualizing Populism and Foreign Policy

Populism has been studied and defined in various ways, responding to different contexts, case studies and the affiliation of the authors addressing the phenomenon. However, it is possible to establish a systematization of the state of art of the contemporary debate used by the academic community.

Authors such as Paul (Taggart, 2000); Kurt (Weyland, 2001); Raúl (Madrid, 2008); Carlos and Enrique (de la Torre & Peruzzotti, 2008); Kenneth (Roberts, 2008); Robert (Barr, 2009); Robert (Jansen, 2011); Steven and James (Levitsky & Loxton, 2013), among others, consider populism as a political mobilization, political style or political strategy—their conceptual similarities allow to cluster them in the same group—that consists of applying redistributive and nationalist economic policies (Weyland), of organizing the state structure in a personalistic way that derives from the direct exercise of public power (political style). And, finally, they constantly appeal to the people, seeking their political mobilization through the use of patronage networks and plebiscites.



On the other hand, Ernesto (Laclau, 2005); Hawkins (2010); and Casullo (Casullo), among others, understand populism as a political discourse, that is, a way of saying and presenting things. They use a rhetoric that constructs politics in terms of an antagonistic struggle between the people and the elite. In this way, society is polarized in two large antagonistic fields —although they also support the idea of a thin-centered ideology of Mudde and Kaltwasser, they highlight the role of that ideology in the discursive construction of a political reality—. Laclau (Laclau), instead, proposes that this phenomenon is manifested as a political logic, as a way of constructing the political, of forming the collective identities, that is, the formation of the people as a political-historical actor although it emphasizes the transcendental role that fulfills the political speech in the construction of the collective identities.

On the other side, authors such as Mudde (Mudde); Stanley (Stanley); Zanatta (2014); Rovira Kaltwasser and Hawkins (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser); see populism as an ideological phenomenon focused on a set of ideas characterized by an antagonism between people and elite, where the former holds sovereignty and the latter corruption. In their perspective, populism needs thick ideologies such as liberalism or socialism to make sense of their government programs. This is the reason why right-wing or left-wing populism can exist.

Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017) argue that it is feasible to create a “definition that is able to accurately capture the core of all major past and present manifestations of populism, while still precise enough to exclude clearly non-populist phenomena”. In recent decades, a number of social scientists have chosen to define populism as an “ideational approach” by conceiving it as a discourse, an ideology or a way of conceiving the world. Far from reaching a consensus on the precise definition of the populist phenomenon (especially in language and peripheral elements), the “ideational approach” managed to share a number of key elements within the different definitions such as the reference to a “people” denouncing the existence of an “elite”. (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

Defining populism as a “thin-centered ideology” is useful in order to understand “the oft-alleged malleability of the concept in question” (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). The authors understand ideology as a set of normative ideas about the nature of man and society as well as organizations and their objectives. In simple words, “it is a view of how the world is and should be” (Mudde & Rovira



Kaltwasser, 2017). Unlike “full ideologies” (socialism, liberalism and fascism among others), the authors said, “thin- centered ideology” like populism has a restricted morphology that, in most cases, must be accompanied by a “full ideology” that completes it and allows to promote concrete political projects. Therefore, “by itself populism can offer neither complex nor comprehensive answers to the political questions that modern societies generate” (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

According to the authors, this way of defining populism allows it to take different forms that are consistent in the way the key elements of populism appear to relate to other concepts, “forming interpretative frames that might be more or less appealing to different societies” (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

The plurality of definitions on populism gives an idea of the extension and density of a phenomenon that affects all the activities of a State. Within these activities that of foreign policy is crucial to pinpoint. For instance, Verbeek and Zaslove (Verbeek & Zaslove) refer to foreign policy as a fairly common, though much-debated, concept. They understand foreign policy generally as “the intentions and actions of an actor directed at the actor’s external world” (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017). In most cases, the actor refers to sovereign states (Neack, 2008). They are also aware that nowadays the concept of traditional foreign policy (focused only on the external actions of the state) generates a series of theoretical difficulties. In particular, because a succession of new non-state, sub-national and supranational actors have emerged who would be able to exercise or apply a foreign policy, that is, a set of actions aimed at pursuing their interests at the global level.

In this case, and to make it clear from the beginning, it is understood that foreign policy is exclusive to sovereign states and only they can conduct it through diplomacy. Colacrai and Lechini (Colacrai & Lechini, 1994) define foreign policy as “a public policy that encompasses the set of decisions and actions taken by the rulers of a nation-state to operate in the international system, in response to internal and external demands and determinants”. It is implemented through a programme that has a dual function: on the one hand, to fulfil the aims or goals proposed and, on the other, to solve the problems that arise in the international sphere, whether they are new or have been caused by previous administrations.

The advance towards the theory of foreign policy was given by the approach of neoclassical realism. This “emerging school of foreign



policy theory” (Lobell et al., 2009) as some authors call it “interlink the structural-systemic qualities of realism with a specialized approach to the elite decision-makers, the FPE - Foreign Policy Executive” (Monroy Hernández, 2014). As we mentioned earlier, foreign policy is composed of internal and external variables.

With the study of domestic factors, i.e. “ideological differences, internal political pressures or the psychology of the leader” (Rose, 1998), researchers, in the fields of foreign policy studies, are trying to establish the extent to which they can influence or impact foreign policy. External factors are determined by the international system, which is made up of a set of state and non-state actors competing with each other in the pursuit of their own interests. This competition can be a condition or an opportunity for a state depending on its foreign policy objective, its material and resource mobilization capacities.

Returning to the domestic variables, it is important to highlight the role of the human factor which is the one that makes the decisions in matters of foreign policy. In this respect, it is pertinent to point out that this idea of the human factor emanates from “an anthropology of International Relations, which places man at the centre of the study of this discipline and of foreign policy, whether acting alone or in a group” (Monroy Hernández, 2014).

According to Alexander George (George, 1991), the political behaviour of the executive power holder will depend on his cognitive beliefs, that is, his ideology, vision of the world and beliefs about political strategies and tactics, which he has acquired throughout his personal and political life. Colacrai and Lechini express a similar idea, arguing that, in the Argentine case, especially during the government of Carlos Menem (1989-1999), “the decision-making process was concentrated in the figure of the President of the Nation and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who were the ultimate decision-making unit” (Colacrai & Lechini, 1994). Therefore, we believe there is a link between populism understood as ideology (thin-centered) and foreign policy.

What’s Kirchnerism and why they were populists?

We discuss its development in the analysis of the three administrations of the Kirchners, first Nestor and then Cristina (2003-2015). Kirchnerism’s followers argue that it successfully boosted the country from its worst crisis (Weyland) to set into motion a virtuous model of growth and social inclusion. Its adversaries, instead, consider the period as a populist backslide characterized by economic mishandling,



widespread corruption and presidential authoritarianism (Gervasoni & Peruzzotti, 2015).

In this sense, Erdem Aytaç and Ziya Öniş (Aytaç & Öniş) argue that Kirchnerism, in addition to being a political movement, was populist and use Barr's categories (leadership by an outsider or a maverick, heavy use of anti-establishment appeals, and emphasis on plebiscitary linkages) to support their claims. Beyond the differences in terms of what populism is - a thin-centered ideology, a political strategy, style or political discourse - all authors agree on certain characteristics common to the different populist governments as outlined by Barr.

The authors continue to highlight the elements that allow them to affirm that the Kirchners' government was populist. So, they argue that, although Néstor Kirchner's candidacy during the 2003 presidential elections was backed by the Peronist interim president Eduardo Duhalde, as governor of a small Patagonian province he was little known to the public (Aytaç & Öniş, 2014).

Secondly, the fact that they presented themselves as outside 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. 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 "gen-rals" ("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"). (Aytaç & Öniş, 2014).

Finally, the authors highlight the fact that both presidents emphasized plebiscitary links between the people and the ruler, as they greatly increased executive power at the expense of other institutions. Levisky and Murillo (Levitsky & Murillo) point out that Néstor Kirchner "governed at the margins of Congress and other institutions of horizontal accountability" and interfered with judicial independence:



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. 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. (Aytaç & Öni , 2014).

Some might ask why they did not mainly make an analysis of Kirchnerism as an Ideational Approach. The answer is very simple, but crucial to mention: it is not necessary to do so to fulfill our goal. Indeed, we are only interested in demonstrating that Kirchnerism is considered populist by most authors and what's better than quoting authors from other latitudes who use another author as Barr to conceptualize Kirchnerism as populist. On the other hand, the Ideational Approach, far from opposing other definitions, seeks to reach a minimum consensus on what populism is, and those “minimum elements” are present in Barr's conceptualization. Let's put it this way, what at first would seem to be a contradiction, ends up making sense under a different logic.

As Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser) said, “The political-strategic definition is not necessarily opposed to a consideration of ideas and rhetoric (Barr 2009; Levitsky and Loxton 2013), but it tends to see the discourse of populists as less important predictors of their behavior” (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser).

Foreign Policy Analysis of Kirchnerism

Néstor Kirchner

Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) assumed the presidency of the Republic on May 25, 2003 in a context of “certain” political, social and economic stability but with urgent problems to solve such as economic reactivation, reduction of poverty, social exclusion and foreign debt—the year before Argentina, under the interim presidency of Adolfo Rodríguez Saá, had declared itself in default—.

Throughout his mandate, there were a number of phrases that remained very present during his official speeches (11 spoke specifically of foreign policy) such as Argentine People; By Popular Mandate,



Historical Understanding and Political Decision¹; National Capitalism; Rich Countries vs. Poor Countries²; Poverty, Social Exclusion and Unemployment³; Foreign Policy Oriented to the Defense of the Legitimate Interests of the Argentine People⁴; National Autonomy and People's Sovereignty⁵; Brother Towns; Reform of the Multilateral Credit Organizations; IMF; The foreign debt will not be paid at the expense of the hunger of the Argentines⁶; International Co-responsibility⁷; Mercosur as a space for integration and regional unity⁸; Prosperity for the few and misery for the many; Regional Solidarity⁹; Globalization as a generator of poverty and social exclusion¹⁰; Washington Consensus and the neoliberal model as the ones responsible for structural adjustment and foreign debt¹¹.

We can resume his populist perspective in one phrase “By popular mandate, by historical understanding and by political decision, this is the opportunity for transformation, for the cultural and moral change that the hour demands. Change is the name of the future.” (Kirchner, May 25, 2003).

1. Discurso de asunción del Presidente Néstor Kirchner a la Asamblea Legislativa el 25 de mayo del 2003. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/discurso-de-asuncion-del-presidente-nessor-kirchner-a-la-asamblea-legislativa-el-25-de-mayo-del-2003/> (1 march 2020).

2. Palabras de Néstor Kirchner en el cierre de la Cumbre de las Américas en Monterrey, 13 de enero de 2004. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/nessor-kirchner-en-la-cumbre-de-las-americas-en-monterrey/> (1 march 2020).

3. Palabras del Presidente Néstor Kirchner en la 59° Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas, el 21 de setiembre de 2004. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/nessor-kirchner-en-la-59-asamblea-general-de-las-naciones-unidas/> (2 march 2020).

4. Discurso de Néstor Kirchner ante la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas, 14 de setiembre de 2005. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/nessor-kirchner-en-las-naciones-unidas-en-2005/> (2 march 2020).

5. Palabras del Presidente Néstor Kirchner en la IV Cumbre de las Américas en el Auditorio del Hotel Provincial, Mar del Plata, 4 de noviembre de 2005. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/nessor-kirchner-en-la-iv-cumbre-de-las-americas-en-mar-del-plata/> (3 march 2020).

6. Discurso del presidente Néstor Kirchner al anunciar el pago adelantado al FMI, 15 de diciembre de 2005. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/discurso-del-presidente-nessor-kirchner-al-anunciar-el-pago-adelantado-al-fmi-15-de-diciembre-de-2005/> (3 march 2020).

7. Discurso del Presidente Néstor Kirchner ante el Consejo de las Américas, New York, 22 de setiembre de 2004. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/nessor-kirchner-en-el-consejo-de-las-americas-new-york-2004/> (3 march 2020).

8. Discurso de Néstor Kirchner en la Cumbre del Mercosur en Ouro Preto, 17 de diciembre de 2004. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/cumbre-del-mercosur-en-ouro-preto/> (4 march 2020).

9. Palabras del presidente de la Nación Néstor Kirchner en la Asamblea Nacional de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 6 de julio de 2006. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/nessor-kirchner-en-la-asamblea-nacional-de-venezuela-2006/> (4 march 2020).

10. Palabras del Presidente Néstor Kirchner en la 58° Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas el 25 de setiembre de 2003. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/discurso-de-nessor-kirchner-en-la-onu-2003/> (4 march 2020).

11. Discurso pronunciado por el presidente Néstor Kirchner ante la 61ra. Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas, 2006. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/nessor-kirchner-en-la-onu-2006/> (5 march 2020).



A careful analysis of the postulates of Mudde, Rovira Kaltwasser and Hawkins about populism as an “Ideational Approach” shows what the government of Néstor Kirchner thought of the world. First, there was clear mention of the Argentine people as the only sovereign (people as sovereign) expressing their “general will” through the popular mandate. On the other hand, the people were seen as victims of the multilateral credit organizations, composed of the IMF and private banks, which together with the local *petty bourgeoisie* were part of the global financial elite that operated for years against the interests of the people in a very favorable context of globalization, in order to impose the prosperity of a few and the misery of the majority.

At the international-political level, the reasoning followed these same lines, a marked difference between the “rich countries” (THEY) of the north (with the US as their main promoter and beneficiary) established the international rules of the game that notably harmed the “poor countries” (WE) of the south (Argentina among others). The consolidation maneuvers were manifested by the imposition of the neoliberal model “agreed upon” in the Washington Consensus of structural adjustment and foreign debt of the countries of the South, together with a policy of exporting agricultural subsidies/grants for the economies of the North. This is the Manichean mind map with which Néstor designed his populist foreign policy that had internal and external variables as the foreign policy authors theorized.

Its foreign policy had main structuring axes, like MERCOSUR, a space of integration and regional unity; the UN reform to end the privileges of the Security Council and include the issues of social and economic development like poverty reduction; the reform of the international financial system through the IMF so that it take into account distributive equity, poverty and employment; the reinforcement of the links with the brother countries, especially Brazil and Venezuela; the negotiation of the foreign debt under the banner of co-responsibility and the failure of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) led and financed by the US.

In this sense, Néstor Kirchner’s foreign policy strengthened the relationship with politically related countries through MERCOSUR (Simonoff, 2010), promoting the entry of Bolivia and Venezuela as full members of the regional organization, intensified his relations with Lula Da Silva’s Brazil, included Argentina in UNASUR (Miranda, 2004). Despite believing that priority should be given to the institutional strengthening of MERCOSUR, diversified foreign trade and integrated it into the national productive matrix. He distanced



himself from the Americans (Tokatlian, 2008) and renegotiated the foreign debt as well as fought for fairer international trade by preventing the US and the EU from concluding an agreement on agricultural subsidies for the Cancun Summit in September 2003. He managed to sink the FTAA project during the 2004 summit in Mar del Plata, Argentina, with the excuse that it would not benefit the countries of the region and would only accentuate the trade gaps between Latin America and the U.S.

In other words, he imbued his foreign policy with a populist vision that allowed him to regain room for maneuver in order to restore to the Argentine people their dignity as sovereigns and better economic conditions as ordinary people.

In relation to the 4 categories identified by Destradi and Plagemann (Destradi & Plagemann) we argue that the government of Néstor Kirchner did not seek a more conflict-prone bilateral relations with the central countries (USA and EU) mainly because it needed their help to negotiate the foreign debt: it was a conflict-prone relationship from the discourse but friendly from the practice. However, with multilateral credit agencies such as the IMF did not happen the same, with which he tightened his ties to the point of settling the debt with the organization and breaking relations.

In relation to the attempt at a weakening of global governance and its institutions, he weakened and broke with international financial bodies. He was deliberately seeking to gain a position in this area in order to obtain greater room for maneuver in the negotiation of the foreign debt and to put an end to the recurring problem of Argentina's default, due to the irresponsibility of governments and the international financial system. But he was not trying to weaken the United Nations system, for example; on the contrary, he made it stronger by providing it with more bureaucratic instruments and greater capacity for action through the modification of the Security Council. His populist policy was evident into modify the international institutional structure but not in his endeavor to weaken it.

Undoubtedly, his foreign policy was a more centralized and personalized foreign policy where the design and even the implementation of policies were done from the presidency and the foreign minister, without taking into account the diplomatic bureaucracy or the country's foreign tradition. Even the national media¹² spoke of an

12. "La lista de embajadores que quiere jubilar Timerman". Available at: <https://www.lapolitica-online.com/nota/nota-67663/> (5 march 2020).



attempt to make entry to the diplomatic career more flexible through the Institute of the Foreign Service, to allow the entry of personnel in line with the interests of the national government and thus overcome the bureaucratic obstacles, that certain career officials imposed on the president and his minister.

Definitely building up a new international partnership while weakening the link to traditional western partners was very present not only with the strengthening of MERCOSUR as an institution of regional integration but also with the creation of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) that came to fulfill the same functions that the Organization of American States (OAS) already had but without the presence of the USA. The idea was to design a regional integration system with a continental vocation that would unite the populist ideals of the majority of the member countries (Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay and Venezuela) and begin to strengthen the economic, political and social ties of the “brothers countries”. It was a clear attempt to build a new system of regional alliances to weaken the previous one represented by the OAS.

Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner

On October 28, 2007, the official presidential formula Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (2007-2015)-Julio Cobos triumphed with just over 45% of the votes, thus giving continuity to the project initiated in 2003 by Néstor Kirchner. In her opening speech¹³ to the Congress of the Republic, she spoke of globalization as a process that is contrary to the interests of the nation since the economic and social development of a country is achieved through the unrestricted defense of national interests. the populist notion of national and international political reality is linked to the idea of domestic and external variables were into account on the designer of foreign relations.

It then goes on to reaffirm the idea of a collective political project, which includes the people and is contrary to the liberal claims of social, political and economic individuality.

I have never believed in personal and individual triumphs, I deeply disbelieve in them, because I believe in collective constructions and society.

This last October 28th precisely validated, ratified a different political,

13. Mensaje de la Presidenta a la Asamblea Legislativa del Congreso de la Nación en su asunción del mando, 10 de diciembre de 2007. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/asuncion-de-cristina-kirchner-10-de-diciembre-de-2007/> (5 march 2020).



social and economic construction, we did it with all the Argentines (Fernández, December 10, 2007).

This inaugurated a period characterized by a high level of political confrontation that led Cristina's government to defy directly the national media and the countryside (agro-industrial sector) where both would go on to constitute the local ELITE which was identified with the concentration of political and economic power in the country. At an external level, the confrontation took place against a group of international creditors, called "Vulture Funds", who refused to be included in the renegotiation of the foreign debt and decided to threaten the national government in court for the payment of the bonds owed.

She continues to highlight the issue of debt relief with the IMF and the need to continue with an economic development model with reasonable autonomy "in a globalized world". Two key aspects during the previous presidency, and which also seem to be so for President Cristina. She shows her Manichean vision of the international reality by leaning on the External Villain¹⁴, the International Monetary Fund, and adding another, already known, globalization. Although the latter is not a global institution, a country or a group of agents that possess economic power, but rather a process that allowed the consolidation of the neoliberal system and its brutal concentration of world wealth and therefore of the increase in inequality, the president will treat it as if it were. Always associating it with the External Villain.

In other words, globalization as such is part of the evils to be eradicated in order to give back to the People their condition of sovereignty, understood as the expression of the general will and of common people who lost their economic rights because of this process.

Their idea of inserting themselves into the world would be through regional organizations such as MERCOSUR and the recently created UNASUR (Union of South American Nations), which was intended to function as a space for dialogue on the problems and challenges they shared as a region, but also served as a place for populist consolidation. In particular among the governments of Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela that took advantage of the ideological closeness to join efforts in the national, regional and international

14. It is that international agent that seeks the domination and conquest of the people understood in sovereign terms, in: Maria E. Casullo, *Por qué funciona el populismo? El discurso que sabe construir explicaciones convincentes de un mundo en crisis* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores Argentina, 2019).



strengthening of their administrations. In the literature¹⁵ were known as the “Left-Wing Populisms; Left Populisms or Inclusionary Populisms”.

Cristina had a concept of people as a Nation (homeland)¹⁶ rather than as ordinary people. Although both conceptions are present throughout the speeches of both leaders, the truth is that one conception always prevails over the other. For instance, Néstor had a vision of the People more oriented to the Common People and Cristina more similar to the Nation (homeland). This was particularly evident in her foreign policy, which permanently sought to guarantee national autonomy by strengthening links with emerging global actors such as Russia and China, which were hailed as states that respected popular sovereignty and sought to do productive business for the Argentine people. And, at the regional level, the same was done with MERCOSUR and UNASUR along with the relationship of brotherhood with Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela.

The themes that marked her 8 years of government, according to theirs more than 23 speeches that speak about foreign relations, were; Regional integration as a barrier to external threats¹⁷; Reform of multi-lateral credit organizations¹⁸; Shared responsibility between central and peripheral nations¹⁹; UN reform that privileges a few²⁰; Food security

15. Y. Stavrakakis, A. Kioupiolis, G. Katsambekis, N. Nikisianis, & T. Siomos, ‘Contemporary Left-wing Populism in Latin America: Leadership, Horizontalism, and Postdemocracy in Chávez’s Venezuela’, *Latin American Politics and Society*, 58(3), 2016, pp. 51-76. Doi:10.1111/j.1548-2456.2016.00318.x

16. Mensaje de la Presidenta a la Asamblea Legislativa del Congreso de la Nación en su asunción del mando, 10 de diciembre de 2007. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/asuncion-de-cristina-kirchner-10-de-diciembre-de-2007/> (6 march 2020).

17. Discurso de la presidenta Cristina Fernández de Kirchner en el acto de apertura de la xxxv Cumbre del Mercosur, Tucumán 01 de julio de 2008. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/discurso-de-cristina-en-la-cumbre-del-mercosur-2008/> (6 march 2020).

18. Mensaje de la presidenta Cristina Fernández de Kirchner a la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas, Nueva York 23 de septiembre de 2008. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/mensaje-de-cristina-a-la-asamblea-general-de-la-onu-2008/> (7 march 2020).

19. Mensaje de la Presidenta Cristina Fernández de Kirchner en la Asamblea General de la Organización de las Naciones Unidas. 24 de septiembre de 2010. Nueva York. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/cfk-en-la-onu-mensaje-en-la-asamblea-general-de-2010/> (7 march 2020).

20. Discurso de la presidenta de la nación, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, en la 66a Asamblea General de la Organización de las Naciones Unidas, en Nueva York. Miércoles, 21 de Septiembre de 2011. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/discurso-de-cristina-kirchner-66a-asamblea-general-de-la-organizacion-de-las-naciones-unidas/> (9 march 2020).



of central countries²¹; Vulture funds²²; Popular mandate²³; Neoliberal policies and financial globalization as responsible for the deindustrialization of peripheral countries²⁴; Environmental liabilities of developing countries²⁵; The World (Wehner & Thies) vs Investment Funds (Vulture Funds)²⁶; Regional Unity (Mercosur, Unasur, Celac)²⁷; Democracy as an exercise of the popular will²⁸; Risk Rating as Defenders of Investment Funds' Interests²⁹; The Need to Create a New World Order³⁰; Paying to Vulture Funds would be to condemn the whole people to poverty³¹; UN General Assembly as the true sovereign of global democracy³²; The Suffering History of our Peoples³³; Regional Income

21. Foro del sector empresario de la cumbre del G-20. 03 de noviembre de 2011. Cannes, Francia. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/discurso-de-cristina-en-la-cumbre-del-g-20-2011-en-cannes/> (9 march 2020).

22. Mensaje de la Presidenta a la Asamblea Legislativa del Congreso de la Nación en su asunción del mando, 10 de diciembre de 2011. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/asuncion-de-cristina-kirchner-10-de-diciembre-de-2011/> (9 march 2020).

23. Ídem. Mensaje de la Presidenta a la Asamblea Legislativa del Congreso de la Nación en su asunción del mando, 10 de diciembre de 2011. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/asuncion-de-cristina-kirchner-10-de-diciembre-de-2011/> (9 march 2020).

24. Discurso de la presidenta cristina fernandez de kirchner en la 67ª asamblea general de naciones unidas 2012. Available at: <https://www.casarosada.gob.ar/informacion/archivo/26102-67a-asamblea-general-de-las-naciones-unidas-discurso-de-la-presidenta-de-la-nacion> (10 march 2020).

25. Discurso de CFK en la Cumbre de Energía 2013 en Abu Dhabi. Martes 15 de Enero de 2013. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/cumbre-mundial-de-energia-2013-en-abu-dhabi/> (10 march 2020).

26. Quiero referirme a lo que ha sucedido hace unos días en Nueva York. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/la-audiencia-con-los-fondos-buitres-en-ny-y-el-pago-de-la-deuda/> (13 march 2020).

27. Palabras de CFK en la cena en honor de la Presidenta de la República Federativa del Brasil Dilma Rousseff y su comitiva en el Museo del Bicentenario. Jueves, 25 de Abril de 2013. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/cristina-ofrecio-una-cena-de-honor-a-dilma-rousseff-y-su-comitiva/> (13 march 2020).

28. Palabras de CFK, en la clausura del XXIII Período Ordinario de Sesiones de la Conferencia General para la Proscripción de las Armas Nucleares en América Latina y el Caribe (OPANAL). Jueves, 22 de Agosto de 2013. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/cristina-cerro-la-conferencia-general-del-organismo-para-la-proscripcion-de-las-armas-nucleares-en-america-latina-y-el-caribe-opanal/> (14 march 2020).

29. Palabras de Cristina Fernández de Kirchner en la 68a Asamblea General de la Organización de las Naciones Unidas, Nueva York, 24 de septiembre de 2013. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/cristina-68-asamblea-onu/> (14 march 2020).

30. Cristina en la cumbre G77+China «Hacia un nuevo orden mundial para vivir bien», en Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia. 15 de junio de 2014. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/g77-china-hacia-un-nuevo-orden-mundial-para-vivir-bien/> (14 march 2020).

31. Palabras de la Presidenta Cristina Kirchner en la cumbre BRICS con UNASUR en Brasilia, 16 de julio de 2014. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/cristina-kirchner-cumbre-brics-unasur-fondos-buitres/> (15 march 2020).

32. Palabras de Cristina Fernández de Kirchner ante la 69a Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas. Nueva York, 24 de septiembre de 2014. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/cristina-kirchner-69-asamblea-onu/> (15 march 2020).

33. Inauguramos la nueva sede Néstor Kirchner de Unasur, en el Centro del Mundo, en Quito. Viernes, 05 de Diciembre de 2014. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/inauguramos-la-nueva-sede-nestor-kirchner-de-unasur-en-el-centro-del-mundo-en-quito/> (16 march 2020).



Distribution and Citizen Equality³⁴; Hegemonic positions³⁵; Global distributive inequality³⁶.

At the BRICS-UNASUR Summit held in Brasília in July 2014, the BRICS summed up its foreign policy in a populist key: “The call to all countries is to join forces in this true crusade for a new global organization in political, economic and financial matters that will have positive social, political and cultural consequences for our peoples”. There was a clear idea of consolidating populism by uniting with other governments of similar political hues in order to continually sustain the defense of the rights of the people. Carlos de la Torre (de la Torre) made a similar argument when he analyzed Venezuela’s role within ALBA.

The government of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner deepened the foreign policy that began with her predecessor, Néstor Kirchner. It not only continued with its populist conception through a markedly dualistic vision of international reality represented by poor countries vs. rich ones, but also by identifying a global financial elite that operated against the interests of the people as a nation, undermining sovereignty and subjecting them to policies of misery and inequality in order to collect their debts. Figures such as vulture funds, the IMF and the world banks were used to name the global elite with the support of the US government. On the other hand, the figure of poor and rich states (us/them) served to justify their new international alliances in order to obtain greater national autonomy.

However, its differentiation from the previous government in foreign affairs was in two matters. The first was that it had a clear vocation to modify the global governance and its institutions rather than weakening. It is evident that it was concerned with global issues such as climate change, terrorism, international trade, and peace and security, but not from the traditional institutional spaces, the UN, the WTO or the Security Council, but by strengthening international forums such as the G-20 and G-77, which served as spaces for more democratic and pluralistic discussion. They were also used to

34. Cristina en la 47 Cumbre de Jefes y Jefas de Estado del Mercosur, en Paraná, Entre Ríos, 17 de diciembre de 2014. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/cristina-en-la-47-cumbre-del-mercosur-en-parana-entre-rios/> (17 march 2020).

35. Discurso de la Presidenta en el Plenario de la 48o Cumbre de Mercosur en Brasilia. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/plenario-de-la-48o-cumbre-de-mercosur-en-brasilia/> (17 march 2020).

36. Palabras de la Presidenta de la Nación, Dra. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, ante la 70ª Asamblea General de Naciones Unidas, 28 de septiembre de 2015. Available at: <https://www.cfkargentina.com/discurso-de-cristina-kirchner-en-la-70-asamblea-general-de-naciones-unidas-onu/> (18 march 2020).



strengthen links with China and Russia. Clear competitors of the US in the international system.

The other aspect has to do with the “building up a new international partnership while weakening links to traditional western partners which became a regional foreign priority”. To strengthen the links with the brother countries of the region but through UNASUR and MERCOSUR as the fundamental pillars of South American integration leaving aside others like the OAS or the Summit of the Americas. UNASUR had a short but intense life with large regional projects in the making. Although it continued to cultivate its bilateral relations with countries such as Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela. All, except Uruguay, are considered left-wing populist governments.

Conclusions

This paper argues that peculiarities in populist foreign policy were present at the times of Nestor and Cristina Kirchner. More specifically, through their declarations during relevant speeches at international stages it noticed that by enduring a sort of Manichean division of the world into good and bad categories, as in the people *vs* the elite, and poor *vs* rich countries; dramatic foreign policy consequences were developed.

Thanks to this theoretical background and our case study, we have observed that populist foreign policy during Kirchnerism in Argentina has some interesting features to stress. For instance, our case study has shown how populist leaders with the clear intention of strengthening political-populist ties and sharing national experiences implement a process of international cooperation in their mandates and overcome national policies by reinforcing or creating regional alliances in contraposition to former western ones. Moreover, internal and external variables were taken into account when designing the populist foreign policy, as the author of foreign policy points out (Colacrai & Lechini, 1994). In addition, in the analyzed speeches of the two leaders it is clear a reaction to the dynamics of globalization. Indeed, in the words of both presidents, globalization has undermined popular sovereignty at the expense of Argentine national autonomy, and it has also seriously damaged the national economic development of the country.

Therefore, the culprit is the western imprinting or influence. Despite that the criticism of globalization is clear in the words of both



Nestor and Cristina Kirchner, we argue that their populist governments design foreign policies capable of embracing populist strings even beyond domestic politics. Indeed, they are trying to modify the traditional international system creating another one which is closer to their national interests (popular sovereignty, national autonomy and national economic development) and reinforces the relationship with other similar populist governments, preferably in the same region.

Despite the limits of our study, in terms of the time span analyzed and the case study, as we have discussed throughout the paper, our conclusions might suggest an explanatory model which could help to better understand the populist foreign policy during Kirchnerism in Argentina. Finally, our model, as in Fig. 1, could be used in other studies that research foreign policy in other left-wing populists' power and regimes, especially in the Latin American region suggesting further studies on the topic.

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