

Great Recession unemployment fed left-wing populism; unauthorized immigration flows feed right-wing populism

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In the past decade, there has been a great rise in populism in many western democracies. This has led to the emergence of radical and populist politicians. In his Ph.D. research, Shuai Chen investigates the influence of recent unemployment during the Great Recession and the vast influx of unauthorized immigrants on the growth of populism. He shows there is a difference between the populism caused by economic factors and the populism caused by cultural factors.

In his research, Chen uses two quasi-natural experiments that took place in the United States: the Great Recession and the 2014 immigration crisis. He investigated the extent to which the recent unemployment and the influx of unauthorized immigrants led to support for populism and influenced voting behavior in the U.S. Presidential Elections in 2016. He discovers that people that lost their jobs during the Great Recession were more likely to vote for Bernie Sanders, representative of left-wing populism, while cohorts who were already unemployed before the Great Recession were more likely to vote for Clinton, a left centrist.

Among the people living in areas most affected by the increased influx of unauthorized immigrants, an anti-[immigrant](#) attitude developed. This group was more likely to vote for right-wing populist Trump.

Chen uses longitudinal data and the difference between groups (that had become unemployed during the Great Recession versus that were not

unemployed during the whole period; that confronted with a strong increase in the number of unauthorized immigrants versus others) in the change over time (difference in differences) to identify the effects.

There has not been any [empirical studies](#) before on the different drivers between left- and right-wing populism at the individual level. A better understanding of what it is that feeds populism can be a great help to policy makers that want to manage the impact of it.

Provided by Tilburg University

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