

THE POPULIST AMBIVALENCE. PRESIDENTS AND DEMOCRACY IN LATIN AMERICA

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This article aims to explore the relationship between populism and democracy, with evidence from Latin America. We address the performance of five varieties of democracy in the region (electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian) from 1994 to 2019 in 18 countries and focus on the backsliding or its absence during each presidential term. To do so, we rely on a QCA approach, through which we interpret the changes on each variety, acknowledging the presence/absence of populist presidents, presidents' popularity, political and economic critical junctures, support for democracy, an institutionalized party system, and political stability. Results do show an ambivalent relationship between populism and democracy. Although populism emerges as an almost necessary condition for democratic backsliding in any variety, there are a number of cases where the presence of populist presidents led to an improvement of (varieties of) democracy.