

## **Populist Political Economies And The Cultural Politics Of Tourism**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**The reemergence of populism in recent years has had a significant impact on various sectors, including tourism. This article examines the connection between the rise of populist political movements and the image of tourism destinations. Using the IMRAD format, the study explores how populism influences the perception of these destinations and the challenges that arise for tourism industries. The findings indicate that populism, through its focus on nationalism, anti-globalism, and local identity, has reshaped the marketing, appeal, and sustainability of tourism destinations.**

### **KEYWORDS**

**Populism, Tourism Destinations, Nationalism, Globalization, Tourism Marketing, Local Identity, Anti-globalism, Overtourism, Destination Management, Political Influence on Tourism, Cultural Heritage, Sustainable Tourism, International Tourism, Border Control Policies, Local Pride, National Sovereignty, Tourism Perception, Tourism Industry Trends, Political Ideologies, Tourist Flow.**

### **I**NTRODUCTION

Populism, characterized by a political ideology that often emphasizes anti-establishment rhetoric, nationalism, and skepticism of globalization, has seen a resurgence globally in recent years. While its impacts on politics, economics, and society are widely discussed, the relationship between populism and tourism has been relatively underexplored. Tourism, a global industry reliant on the free movement of people, faces potential shifts in demand and perception due to populist sentiments that challenge the ideals of openness and internationalism.

This paper explores how the rise of populism influences the image of tourism destinations. Specifically, it examines whether populist movements, which often prioritize national sovereignty, border control, and local identity, affect how destinations market themselves and how tourists perceive these locations. Understanding this connection can help tourism stakeholders anticipate challenges, reshape strategies, and ensure the continued vitality of the industry in a changing political landscape.

The resurgence of populism in the 21st century has significantly reshaped political landscapes across the globe. While populism traditionally involves a discourse that pits “the people” against “the elite,” its effects go beyond political realms, extending into economic policies, societal values, and even industries that rely on cross-border interaction and cultural exchange. Among these industries, tourism stands out as one that has experienced shifts driven by populist sentiment, yet the connection between these political movements and tourism’s image has received limited attention in academic literature. Understanding how populism influences tourism is vital, especially given the sector’s dependence on international cooperation, open borders, and the global movement of people.

Tourism is an industry that thrives on openness, exchange, and the flow of international visitors. The sector relies on the idea of a globalized world where cultural, economic, and social boundaries are, to some extent, blurred. However, populist ideologies are fundamentally critical of globalization. They argue that it erodes national sovereignty, homogenizes local cultures, and enriches a global elite at the expense of ordinary citizens. This tension between the ideals of open, interconnected global tourism and the growing populist narrative of “taking back control” creates an intriguing dynamic that merits deeper examination. As such, the tourism industry is caught between two opposing forces: the globalizing trends of international tourism and the localizing, nationalist rhetoric espoused by populist movements.

Populism is often characterized by a rejection of elites, an emphasis on national identity, and a deep skepticism toward globalization. Populist leaders frequently advocate for policies that limit foreign influence and focus on safeguarding local culture, heritage, and economic interests. In this context, tourism becomes a focal point, as it often involves the movement of people across borders and the introduction of foreign ideas, customs, and products. At the same time, populist movements can co-opt tourism to advance nationalist agendas by promoting domestic tourism, emphasizing the value of local heritage, and encouraging citizens to rediscover their national roots.

For example, in countries such as Hungary, Poland, the United States, and the United Kingdom—where populist movements have gained significant traction—the image of tourism destinations has been affected in various ways. Nationalist governments in these countries have often prioritized domestic interests, which in some cases has led to the introduction of policies that make it more difficult for international tourists to visit, such as stricter visa policies, travel restrictions, and anti-immigrant rhetoric. These actions directly influence how tourism destinations present themselves to the world and how they are perceived by international visitors. At the same time, populist ideologies have led to efforts to protect local heritage and limit overtourism, which paradoxically can enhance the appeal of certain destinations by promoting them as unspoiled, authentic, or “resistant” to the pressures of global tourism.

Moreover, the rise of populism also presents unique challenges to the tourism industry itself. Global tourism brands that once sought to market destinations as symbols of openness and cultural exchange may now find themselves at odds with the growing nationalism and protectionism that many populist movements champion. The image of a “globalized destination,” appealing to a broad international audience, could be increasingly replaced with an emphasis on national pride and the promotion of local culture, potentially narrowing the market for some destinations and attracting a more select group of visitors who align with the populist values of the host nation.

Another important consideration is the effect of populism on how tourists perceive destinations. Nationalism and protectionism may create an environment where certain regions are viewed as hostile to outsiders, making it less attractive for international tourists. Conversely, some tourists may be drawn to destinations that promote themselves as resisting the influence of globalization, seeing them as more authentic or “off the beaten path.” These shifting perceptions highlight the dynamic and often contradictory relationship between populism and tourism destinations. As populist rhetoric continues to gain momentum, the tourism industry must adapt its marketing strategies, destination management practices, and operational approaches to align with—or at least mitigate—these new political and social realities.

The growing tension between nationalism and globalization also presents significant opportunities for destinations to differentiate themselves in a crowded global tourism market. As countries like Hungary and Poland increasingly market their destinations as havens of local culture and national pride, there is an

opportunity for other regions to cater to tourists seeking authentic, locally driven experiences that are marketed as alternatives to mass tourism. However, this approach may also come with challenges, as nationalistic rhetoric risks alienating tourists who value diversity and cross-cultural exchange.

In light of these challenges and opportunities, this study aims to examine the connection between the reemergence of populism and the image of tourism destinations in more depth. Specifically, the paper explores how populist movements, which emphasize nationalism, sovereignty, and local identity, shape the marketing strategies of tourism destinations and influence tourists' perceptions of these locations. Given the prominence of populism in global politics, it is important to understand how political ideologies intersect with the tourism sector, as these developments have the potential to influence the long-term trajectory of tourism, local economies, and the global cultural exchange that has long been a hallmark of the industry.

The central research question for this study is: How does the rise of populism affect the image of tourism destinations, and what are the implications for the marketing, sustainability, and appeal of these destinations in an increasingly polarized global landscape?

To address this question, the study will investigate several key areas:

1. How populist governments alter tourism policies and regulations, and the subsequent impact on tourism flows.
2. The role of nationalism and local identity in shaping destination marketing strategies and the perception of tourism destinations by international tourists.
3. The rise of anti-globalism within tourism, including efforts to curb overtourism and promote more sustainable, localized travel experiences.
4. The challenges faced by tourism operators in navigating populist sentiments, balancing national pride with international tourist expectations.

By analyzing these aspects in greater detail, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how populism influences the tourism industry, offering valuable insights for policymakers, tourism professionals, and destination marketers who must navigate these evolving political and social dynamics. The findings from this research are intended to contribute to the growing body of literature on the intersection of politics, tourism, and globalization, while also providing practical recommendations for stakeholders in the tourism sector.

## **METHODS**

The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative analysis of political discourses with quantitative data from tourism industry reports. First, a literature review was conducted to examine existing studies on the intersection of populism and tourism. Second, a case study approach was used, focusing on specific tourism destinations in countries with significant populist movements, such as Hungary, Poland, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Data was collected from government reports, tourism statistics, marketing campaigns, and social media sentiment analysis. Interviews with industry experts, policymakers, and local tourism operators were also conducted to gain deeper insights into the perceptions of populism's impact on tourism.

## **RESULTS**

The analysis revealed several key trends in the connection between populism and the image of tourism

destinations:

1. **Shift Towards National Identity:** Populist rhetoric has led to a resurgence of national pride in some regions, influencing the marketing strategies of tourism boards. Destinations are increasingly highlighting local culture, heritage, and authenticity, positioning themselves as alternatives to the globalized, homogeneous tourist experiences that populists often criticize.
2. **Restrictive Policies:** Populist governments tend to implement policies that restrict immigration and limit the ease with which international tourists can access certain destinations. These policies can impact tourist flow and the overall appeal of a destination, particularly in regions heavily reliant on international tourism.
3. **Anti-Globalization Sentiment:** The anti-globalist sentiments espoused by populist movements often lead to a rejection of mass tourism, with calls to limit the influx of tourists to protect local communities, environments, and economies. This has resulted in some destinations prioritizing "quality over quantity," focusing on attracting tourists who align with local values or who contribute to sustainable tourism practices.
4. **Polarized Perceptions:** Populism has contributed to the polarization of tourist destinations, where some may be viewed as symbols of globalism and elitism, while others are celebrated for resisting outside influences. This has created a divide between "global" and "local" tourism experiences, with certain regions positioning themselves as resistant to the pressures of international tourism trends.
5. **Impact on Local Communities:** In some areas, populist-led campaigns against overtourism have led to a decline in tourist numbers, which has had both positive and negative effects. On one hand, reduced tourism has alleviated some of the pressures on local infrastructure and the environment. On the other hand, tourism-dependent economies have experienced financial difficulties.

## **D**ISCUSSION

The findings suggest that the reemergence of populism has led to a recalibration of tourism marketing and destination management. While some tourism destinations may benefit from an emphasis on national identity and authentic experiences, others may face challenges due to restrictive policies or declining international visitor numbers.

Populism's focus on local culture and heritage offers an opportunity for destinations to differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive global market. However, it also presents risks, as the anti-globalist rhetoric of populist movements can alienate international tourists and create a less welcoming environment for foreign visitors. The growing sentiment against mass tourism, while beneficial for sustainability, could undermine long-term revenue streams in popular tourist destinations.

The tourism industry must adapt to these shifting dynamics by carefully navigating the complex relationship between local and global influences. Destinations will need to balance nationalistic sentiments with the needs of international travelers, ensuring that policies and marketing strategies reflect a harmonious coexistence of local pride and global appeal.

The intersection of populism and tourism represents a multifaceted and evolving relationship, shaped by the broader socio-political dynamics that define populist movements. Populism has created both opportunities and challenges for the tourism industry, with far-reaching implications for how destinations are marketed, perceived, and managed. In this section, we will delve into these dynamics, examining how populism impacts tourism in terms of policy, identity, sustainability, and perception.

### 1. Shift Toward National Identity and Local Culture

One of the most notable effects of populism on tourism destinations is the emphasis on national identity and local culture. Populist rhetoric often stresses the preservation of local traditions and values, positioning globalism and international influences as threats to national integrity. This has led many countries with populist governments to revise their tourism marketing strategies, focusing on highlighting authentic, local experiences that appeal to both domestic and international tourists.

Tourism boards in countries such as Hungary and Poland, for instance, have increasingly marketed themselves as destinations that celebrate and protect their national heritage. Rather than promoting globalized, mass tourism experiences, these countries have sought to present themselves as alternatives to tourist destinations that are perceived to be overly commercialized or influenced by global elites. Local customs, folk traditions, and national history are often central themes in these marketing campaigns, aimed at attracting visitors interested in experiencing the "real" culture of the country.

While this nationalistic approach to tourism marketing can help reinforce a destination's identity and appeal to tourists seeking authentic experiences, it also risks alienating travelers who prefer more cosmopolitan or globalized travel experiences. Additionally, promoting tourism based on national identity can inadvertently fuel political tensions between countries or groups with differing cultural or ideological values.

### 2. Restrictive Policies and Border Control Measures

Populist movements often advocate for stricter border control policies, with the aim of limiting immigration and ensuring that national sovereignty is protected. This skepticism towards open borders extends to the tourism sector, where populist governments may impose travel restrictions, visa requirements, or additional bureaucratic barriers for foreign visitors. For instance, countries with populist leadership may introduce more stringent visa policies, especially for tourists from countries deemed as "outsiders," or enforce travel bans and restrictions that target certain nationalities.

Such measures can have a significant impact on international tourism. On the one hand, restrictions on tourism from specific regions can lead to a decline in international visitor numbers, particularly in countries that rely heavily on foreign tourism as a source of income. On the other hand, populist governments may promote "domestic tourism" or encourage citizens to explore their own country rather than travel abroad. This can help mitigate the economic impact of declining international tourism, but it also creates a shift toward a more insular tourism industry focused on national pride rather than global exchange.

Furthermore, while restrictive policies may appeal to populist supporters who view immigration and tourism through a nationalist lens, they can also damage a destination's reputation, particularly among global travelers who prioritize ease of travel, diversity, and cultural exchange. This duality poses a challenge for tourism-dependent economies: balancing national interests with the need to remain attractive to international tourists.

### 3. Anti-globalism and Sustainable Tourism

The rise of populism has also brought anti-globalist sentiments to the forefront. Populist rhetoric often critiques the influence of international corporations, global tourism trends, and the economic and cultural homogenization brought about by mass tourism. In response to this, some populist governments and regions have adopted policies aimed at curbing overtourism, promoting sustainable tourism practices, and limiting the adverse effects of large-scale international travel on local communities and environments.

For instance, destinations such as Venice and Barcelona, which have been heavily affected by mass tourism, have

found support among populist movements advocating for measures to reduce tourist numbers and protect local culture and infrastructure. Populists often frame this push against overtourism as a means of safeguarding the cultural and environmental integrity of national heritage sites and local communities. While this approach may appeal to residents who are frustrated with the pressures of mass tourism, it can also create tensions with the tourism industry, which depends on a high volume of visitors for economic survival.

The anti-globalism approach aligns with the growing trend of sustainable tourism, which emphasizes responsible travel that respects local cultures, economies, and environments. However, it also presents challenges, as limiting the influx of international tourists can reduce economic revenue from tourism. The tourism industry must balance the promotion of sustainable practices with the need to maintain profitability, and in this environment, populist-led initiatives may force a rethinking of business models in tourist-heavy regions.

#### 4. Polarized Perceptions of Destinations

Populism often leads to a polarization of perceptions regarding tourism destinations. In countries where populism is on the rise, tourism destinations can become symbols of either resistance to globalization or conformity with globalist agendas. This dichotomy can affect the way tourists view these destinations, with some travelers perceiving regions that align with populist values as more "authentic," "genuine," or "resistant to outside influences." For example, destinations that promote their national identity and reject globalized tourism practices may appeal to tourists seeking alternatives to mass tourism or those attracted to nationalist ideologies.

Conversely, destinations perceived as embodying cosmopolitan or globalist values may attract criticism from populist supporters, who view them as sites of cultural erosion or exploitation. This can lead to a negative image for some destinations among segments of the global tourist population, particularly those who feel that such places are out of step with their own nationalist sentiments. The challenge for tourism destinations is navigating these polarized perceptions and finding a way to appeal to diverse tourists while staying true to their identity and values.

#### 5. Economic Impacts and Financial Viability

The economic implications of populism on tourism are both positive and negative. On one hand, focusing on local identity and promoting domestic tourism can help stabilize regions that rely heavily on international visitors by encouraging citizens to travel within their own country. For countries experiencing a rise in populism, domestic tourism can become a cornerstone of the tourism industry, potentially reducing dependence on foreign tourists and enhancing national pride.

However, on the other hand, the restrictive policies often advocated by populist governments can hurt the financial viability of tourism-dependent economies. Stricter border controls, visa regulations, and limitations on international visitors can lead to a decrease in overall tourism revenues, which in turn affects jobs, businesses, and local economies reliant on foreign tourism. Destinations that have historically attracted large numbers of international tourists may experience financial strain as a result of declining visitor numbers, especially if alternative forms of tourism (such as domestic or sustainable travel) do not make up for the loss.

#### CONCLUSION: Navigating the Intersection of Populism and Tourism

The reemergence of populism has undoubtedly reshaped the tourism landscape, forcing destinations to adapt to the new political, economic, and social realities created by nationalist sentiments. While populism has led to a renewed focus on national identity and local culture, it has also brought challenges related to restrictive

policies, polarized perceptions, and the balancing of global and local tourism practices. For the tourism industry to thrive in this changing environment, it will need to adapt its marketing strategies, policies, and practices to ensure that it remains both relevant and sustainable in the face of these complex political shifts.

Ultimately, the tourism industry must navigate the delicate balance between preserving local culture and heritage, promoting sustainable tourism practices, and maintaining an open and welcoming environment for international travelers. The interplay between populism and tourism will continue to evolve, and tourism stakeholders must remain flexible and responsive to the political trends that shape the perceptions, practices, and policies governing global travel.

## CONCLUSION

The reemergence of populism has a profound impact on the tourism industry, reshaping the image of destinations and influencing the strategies employed by tourism boards and operators. As populist movements continue to influence political landscapes, it is essential for tourism stakeholders to monitor these shifts and adapt accordingly. Understanding the link between populism and tourism will allow destinations to remain competitive while staying true to their cultural identity, ensuring a sustainable future for both the tourism industry and local communities.

The study calls for further research into the long-term effects of populism on tourism, particularly in relation to sustainable development, local economy impacts, and the evolving nature of international tourism relations.

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