

## Climate change: a new populist issue?

An article entitled "What makes climate change a populist issue?" was written by Jonathan White in September 2023 and published by the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment and the Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy. It is interesting in that it analyses the relationship between climate change and Europe's populist movements. In this article, "La Fabrique Écologique" outlines a definition of populism based on values that are diametrically opposed to the current politicisation of the climate issue.

**#1** Historically, populism has criticised the elite and the powers that be. In the 2010s, its favourite themes were migration, national identity, and the distribution of power and wealth. Populism promotes civic agency. Because the climate issue is increasingly being presented as requiring emergency measures, which by definition tend to be taken without consulting the public, it has become a new focus of populist criticism.

**#2** Populism tends to see emergency policies drafted in response to climate change as being alarmist. It considers that these could lead to a sort of forced democracy justifying the subordination of citizens' rights and freedoms. Dealing with the climate issue could then take the form of an eco-dictatorship, defined as a political system that justifies the use of anti-democratic methods in the name of environmental protection. Populists claim there is a need to break with the tradition that has led to this form of ecology which they consider technocratic and elitist, proposing alternative emergency policies based on public consultation. The author gives the example of Nigel Farage, founder of the UK's Brexit Party, who opposes his country's ambition to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and has promised to give power to the people through a referendum on the subject.

**#3** The author puts forward strategies to prevent populism from taking over the climate cause for critical purposes. To ensure that environmental measures are not perceived as infringing on freedoms, citizens should be more involved in defining climate targets and the measures needed to achieve them. Referendums are presented as a tool that strengthen citizens' sense of belonging and promote civic action in favour of the climate cause. According to the author, it is also necessary to limit the almost exclusive mention of approaches built around quantified targets, deadlines and the concepts of necessity and urgency in ecological political discourse, instead defending the idea of a future and principles worth defending.

### Populism in France

According to a study carried out by Ipsos-Sopra Steria in October 2022, environmental protection is the second most worrying issue for the French population after purchasing power. In this context, the National Rally (RN) has acknowledged the reality of global warming and, following the Citizen's Convention on Climate in 2021, the party made a counter-proposal for a referendum based on 15 questions relating to the environmental cause. However, the RN has not proposed any concrete solutions to these issues.

### The opinion of Pauline Bureau, the Vice-Chair of "La Fabrique Écologique"

Populist criticism raises the question of the attractiveness of climate measures – and the answer lies not so much in their content as in their integration into an overall long-term vision, described in qualitative terms and co-constructed with citizens.