



RESEARCH ARTICLE

“Populist” Transformations and the Crisis of Governance in Africa From State Building to the Death of Politics

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ABSTRACT

The term ‘populism’ was widely used in Latin America and contested in other parts of the world. However, it was hardly supported in the literature on African politics after independence. Following the realization of Kwame Nkrumah’s political kingdom, with the independence of African countries in the sixties, mobilization of the masses was no longer a top priority on the agenda of the ruling national elites. Indeed, these masses have cut off their ties or reduced them to the organs of the post-independence tyrannical state. Thus, the people in many countries have become marginalized in the public space. The situation did not differ under the policies of dominant one-party systems, which restricted the concept of competitive participation. However, post-colonial traditions have witnessed the emergence of exceptional contexts that have allowed populist leaders to rise, such as Jerry Rawlings in Ghana and Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso. Some African leaders have adopted a racial demagoguery discourse, which motivated hate for the ethnically and culturally different ethos, as in the case of Idi Amin in Uganda when he expelled Asians from his country in 1972 or Robert Mugabe’s land policies in Zimbabwe. However, the framework used to analyze such a pattern of leadership falls under the concepts of Personal rule, Neo-Patrimonialism, neo-autocracy, and so on. This study seeks to focus on the concept of “populism” in its African context and its various transformations, from its employment as an ideology of liberation and emancipation from slavery and colonialism as a program for socialist development to its coming back under the politics of party competition as an electoral strategy. Perhaps this raises some central questions, such as the explanatory factors of the popular culture of populism in African political and social thought after independence. As well as the implications of African neo-populist patterns and patterns on democratization and development strategies in Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Although “populism” was common in studying political issues and governance in Latin America and other regions, it was of limited use in the post-independence African experience (Resnick, 2014). In the wake of the realization of the political kingdom advocated by Kwame Nkrumah in post-independent Africa, the issue of mobilizing the masses is no longer a high priority on the agenda of the ruling national regimes. Indeed, these broad masses have severed or reduced their ties with the authoritarian state apparatus. Accordingly, the people in many countries have become marginalized in the public space. The situation was not different under the policies of one-party systems that restricted the concept of competitive participation. However, the post-colonial tradition has witnessed the emergence of exceptional contexts that gave way to populist leaders, such as the case of Jerry Rawlings in Ghana and Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso (Bienen, 2019; Kraus, 1988).

Some African leaders have gone on to adopt a racist demagogic discourse loaded with feelings of hatred towards other ethnically and culturally different, as in the case of Idi Amin in Uganda when he expelled Asians from his country in 1972 (Hundle, 2018) or Robert Mugabe's land policies in Zimbabwe (Makone, 2025). However, the framework of analysis governing such a leadership style falls under the concepts of personal rule, neo-patriarchy, and so on.

Importance of the Study

This study is significant as it addresses the gap in scholarly discourse on populism in Africa, which analyses of Latin American and European experiences have often overshadowed. By examining the evolution of populism within African political thought, the study sheds light on how populist strategies have been instrumental in shaping governance, economic policies, and social movements across the continent. The research highlights how populism has transformed from a tool of liberation during the anti-colonial era to a mechanism for political mobilization, economic nationalism, and electoral competition in contemporary African democracies. Furthermore, understanding the role of populist rhetoric in governance provides valuable insights into how leaders engage with marginalized communities, challenge elite rule, and sometimes exploit identity politics to consolidate power. The study is crucial in evaluating the impact of populism on democracy, political stability, and policy formulation in Africa, particularly in the face of growing authoritarian tendencies and economic challenges.

Objective and Hypothesis

This study relies on a qualitative approach, analyzing books and secondary sources to understand the governance crisis in Africa and the various dimensions of populism. It examines how populism has transformed over time—beginning as an ideology of liberation and resistance against colonial rule, later serving as a program for socialist development, and ultimately emerging as a political tool in party competition and electoral strategy. In doing so, it aims to uncover the factors that have contributed to the prevalence of populist culture in African political and social thought.

The study operates under the hypothesis that populism in Africa has evolved through distinct phases, from its origins in anti-colonial movements advocating for mass participation and national sovereignty to its later use as an electoral strategy and a means of consolidating power within competitive or authoritarian political systems. It hypothesizes that African populist strategies often intersect with ethnic and nationalist discourses, shaping political competition and governance differently from other global experiences. By testing these hypotheses, the research seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of African political thought and the implications of populism for the continent's future democratic and developmental trajectories.

Furthermore, scholars have emphasized the role of anti-colonial struggles in shaping African populism, arguing that decolonization and the fight for freedom were deeply rooted in mass mobilization (Mabandla & Deumert, 2020). South Africa's liberation struggle within the broader African context represents an example of populism as a form of radical history that extends beyond specific periods and geographical boundaries. This raises key questions regarding the persistence of populist narratives in African political discourse and their impact on democratization and development strategies across the continent.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This study relies on the qualitative approach in collecting and analyzing data by reviewing and analyzing books and secondary sources to understand the governance crisis in the African reality. A review and analysis of the literature will help us discover the dimensions of the concept of "populism" in its African context and its various transformations, starting with its use as an ideology of liberation and emancipation from slavery and colonialism, passing through as a program for socialist development, and ending with consideration for it under the policies of party competition as an electoral strategy. (Nyenhuis, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Populism in Africa is challenging to define due to the dominance of personal rule and the lack of ideological consistency in political parties. Mutsvairo and Salgado (2021) advocate for a cumulative conceptual approach to analyze African populism, highlighting its evolution and the balance between change and continuity across different political regimes. Cheeseman (2021) suggests that while populism can be inclusive, African ethnic politics often undermines this potential, making applying populist theory difficult in Sub-Saharan contexts. Melber (2018) critiques the populist rhetoric of anti-colonial movements in Southern Africa, where post-independence leaders reinforced patriotic histories and "big men" narratives. Populist discourse has been explored about land reform, elections (Nyenhuis, 2020), Marxist ideology (Ekers et al., 2020), and Magufuli's nationalist rhetoric in Tanzania (Paget, 2020). Scholars have also examined anti-Chinese sentiments as a populist strategy in election campaigns (Aidoo, 2017; Hess & Aidoo, 2015). While populism has been extensively analyzed through a strategic political framework in Latin America and Europe (Rueda, 2021), African cases remain underexplored due to the normative biases of this perspective.

Recent scholarship on African populism examines its historical, social, and political contexts, revealing its mobilizing potential and impact on democracy (Resnick, 2018). Research on "populism-in-state-practice" explores how populist rhetoric translates into policies within neoliberal systems (Nakayi & Wiegatz, 2024), while studies on media and discourse highlight the role of political messaging in shaping populist narratives (Ofori, 2025). Historical analyses link populism to anti-colonial and nationalist ideologies (Mazrui & Engholm, 1968), while others assess its connections to authoritarianism and power consolidation (Vidal, 2023; Lacatus, 2023). Key themes include the role of populism in social justice (Ofori, 2025), its postcolonial dimensions, and its effectiveness in addressing historical grievances (Haynes, 2022). Paget (2021) introduces "elitist plebeianism," a concept that contrasts with populism by elevating elites while marginalizing the middle class. Fölscher, de Jager, & Nyenhuis (2021) explore how mainstream parties adapt to rising populist challengers, while van der Westhuizen (2023) examines African populism through the lens of fascism, using the Economic Freedom Fighters in South Africa as a case study. Overall, the study of populism in Africa remains a growing field, encompassing diverse approaches to understanding its manifestations, drivers, and impacts (Gray, 2022).

Populism in African Political Thought

A group of writers and scholars were able to re-review the populist dimension in African political thought by linking the concepts of state, class, and production relations (Heller, 2024). This new account seems to address the intractable crisis in Africa since independence. This search for solutions prompts us to look at the models of Cabral, Fanon, and Nyerere, who put the issue of the people's progress and renaissance at the top of their intellectual and political projects (Martin, 2012).

Perhaps the importance of this "populist" project lies in examining ways to secure the lives of the simple and marginalized people despite the tyranny of the power of capital. It is this wholistic populist view that places Fanon, Cabral, and Nyerere in the same intellectual context. Populism has been defined here as an ideology of liberation and emancipation based on a specific understanding of the relations of production. According to one of the scholars, this populist understanding requires the existence of social classes and precise production units that are the basis and the subject of change.

It is clear that the literature of African political thought, whether in the stage of decolonization or achieving national liberation, has added a left-wing socialist character to the concept of populism. Despite this, some national policies resorted to exploiting the masses to undermine the interests of the popular classes. Supporters of the populist project believe that the concepts of nationalism and sovereignty that the nation-state entails are a means and just a beginning and not an end in itself, as is the case for supporters of nationalist thought. Populists acknowledge the reality of class struggle, where the nation-state drives class inequality. The main concern of "populism" is the peasant issue, and the state's rationality can only be achieved as it seeks to achieve the interests of the peasants as a popular demand. It may be helpful to compare these African intellectual tendencies with the

problem of Russian populism in the nineteenth century. Perhaps reading the works of Peter Lavrov, Vladimir Lenin, and Nikolai Bukharin confirms that:

"Without a culture and a politics of production, there can be no politics of liberation" (Idahosa, 2004)

A comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the political thought of Fanon, Cabral, and Nyerere shows the problem of populism in the African context. The development paths of these three writers appear as follows: In his search for an alternative path to capitalist development, Fanon believes that Africa can educate Europe; A new ideology and new institutions are needed as a basis for political, social, and economic transformation and the achievement of popular democracy. As for Cabral, he called for adopting "a model of development that eschews capitalism and is based on developing the self-awareness of the people and awareness of their ability to make history. Existing institutions and a conscious popular culture can be developed to facilitate socialist development." Stemming from the tradition of Fabian populism, Nyerere saw the ujamaa collectivism as being employed by an extended family directly involved in cooperative activities and decision-making processes. In Nyerere's view, this foundation forms the path of non-capitalist development, which means reaching the goal of agricultural socialism in Tanzania. In any case, African populism, as an intellectual project, is based on the premise that the capitalist path of development is inappropriate and impossible in the African context (Idahosa, 2004).

African Populism: From State Building to the Death of Politics

Undoubtedly, following the evolution of the concept of populism in the African experience reveals its multiple dimensions and uses that reach the point of contradiction and ambiguity. During the early African struggles, it was associated with liberation and emancipation from the humiliation of slavery and the yoke of colonialism. Here, we find that the concept acquired a general ideological character, as it emphasized the meanings of identity and belonging. Perhaps one of the primary uses in this context is expressed by the thought of the Negritude, according to the traditions of Leopold Senghor and Aimee Cesar (Ripert, 2017).

However, the post-independence era showed another form of populism, which served as a strategy for national development that is anti-colonial in its various forms. The early populists in Africa tried to adopt the approach of African socialism, whether by relying on the concepts of traditional communism or Marxism-Leninism, or both. Perhaps Ahmed Sékou Touré's socialism, Nyerere's collectivism, Kaunda's humanism, and Jomo Kenyatta's Harambee (we work together) are all prominent examples of this post-independence socialist populist trend. This style of populism was characterized by emphasizing the concepts of patriotism, anti-capitalism, glorifying the people, and being influenced by Marxist political tendencies. Accordingly, most African leaders of this type led the national liberation movement in their countries.

The ideological roots of socialist populism in Africa can be traced to the early intellectual currents of the anti-colonialist Pan-Africanist and Patriotic Movement that dominated the African intellectual space in the 1960s. This ideology focused on the need to achieve development for the people. Popular participation processes were supposed to be a top priority for these populist systems, but they were restricted within the framework of one-party systems. Despite the many types of African populism, in this case, they were unable, in the end, to achieve the aspirations of the African people.

Sékou Touré created a constant sense of threat in the hearts of his people, especially from enemies plotting against his revolution. The political elite was only the executive arm of the revolution's enemies outside Guinea. Accordingly, Sékou Touré's political discourse focused on the term "we the people," which means the negation of "them" and "the other." It was not surprising that the strategy of this populist leader became focused on mobilizing the masses, individually and collectively, as speakers and listeners to participate in the forces of popular struggle. In other words, we are faced with a "collective" situation that is fighting against the enemies of the "president," which implies standing up to the enemies of the people. Despite Sékou Touré's claims to reach the common masses, he ended up calling for his glorification as the supreme leader of the Guinean revolution. With his magic oratory, he has become more like the prophets, which enabled him to employ this politically in

the face of internal and external enemies. However, this populist style that employs notions of national identity and poverty among the masses has been used to nurture xenophobia, as in the case of Joseph Mobutu (in the Democratic Republic of Congo) and Idi Amin (in Uganda).

With the failure of the generation of nation-state builders to establish acceptable and clear rules of political authority, the state inherited from the colonial era quickly became a home for disease and a source of Africa's structural crisis. At that time, the public space diminished, and many regimes suffered from the military intervention, either directly or indirectly. Perhaps this act paved the way for reconsidering the debate on populist democracy in Africa. This African debate expresses a radical reading of the differences in the existing international system, according to which the economic system is the primary determinant of political and economic systems. Therefore, there is no point in talking about democratic transformation without bringing about radical reforms in the structure of the international system. Samir Amin's theses, which stem from the field of political economy, provide radical solutions by delinking them from the capitalist system, which is very useful. Amin believes that the popular struggle movements in the countries of the South are anti-imperialist, as well as not based on primary religious, sectarian, or tribal affiliations. Perhaps here, he reaffirms the Marxist conception that the working class is the objective factor of the revolution. Mahmoud Mamdani also belongs to this debate, calling for adopting a new developmental perspective that contradicts the (supra-state) perspective. He wanted to move from states to a social logic that considered all the subjective factors and the various forms of organizations expressed by the African popular movements. In his analysis of the Ugandan situation, Mamdani shows an apparent contradiction between the nation-state and the model of popular social movements.

In any case, the popular struggle model here is based on two main factors, the first of which is the state, and the second is the popular forces represented by the masses of the middle class. It is noteworthy, however, that the theorists of this trend are more interested in the changes in the current reality to shape the future. For example, according to Helmy Shaarawi (2010), Mahmoud Mamdani "appears to be more aligned with the rural or peasant situation, risking ignoring its traditional or ethnic condition, which many cling to in the name of resistance to modernity and not resistance to class oppression."

Unsurprisingly, some African populists were among the ranks of the military and armed insurgencies. These leaders were seen as against the policies of the corrupt elite, and they declared their total alignment with the interests of the marginalized and disadvantaged masses to resist the plunder and exploitation policies perpetuated by the state apparatus inherited from the colonial era. This approach to exercising populist power at the hands of these soldiers may explain the tendency of some writers to associate populism with the new leftist thought in Africa.

There is no doubt that this anti-political style of populism is different from the socialist style which was expressed by the leaders of national liberation in Africa, as it is associated mostly - as we mentioned - with army officers and leaders of rebel movements against the established rule, that is, it is hostile to the ruling political class. The examples of Rawlings in Ghana, Sankara in Burkina Faso, and most of Yoweri Museveni's rule in Uganda provide clear examples of this pattern. We can define the most prominent features of this anti-political populism as follows:

- A pattern of self-centered personal leadership
- For the most part, the new populist leader does not belong to the ruling political class, as he is coming from outside it.
- Adopting a political discourse hostile to politics and state institutions inherited from the previous era, it targets corruption and existing parties.
- Calling for restoring the people's authority through direct representation, as is the case in the experience of the revolutionary and popular committees implemented by Gaddafi in Libya and Sankara in Burkina Faso.
- Adopting a new strategy to mobilize the masses to legitimize the new governance strategy. This mobilization strategy relies on (a) A leader who addresses the people directly to seek support and legitimacy. Perhaps this requires a pivotal role for the media and a highly

chauvinistic political discourse, which may reach the point of demagoguery. (b) The dynamics of direct democracy include representative bodies at the local level and the frequent use of popular suffrage.

However, the politics of party competition witnessed in Africa since the early nineties of the last century showed a new form of the populist project in Africa. It expresses a strategy of governance that uses political parties to mobilize the masses behind a leader with some charismatic qualities, such as the contexts of democratization in many African countries such as Zambia, Senegal, South Africa, Kenya, and Tanzania. Unfortunately, compared to the Latin American experience, this phenomenon has not received enough attention.

Electoral Populism Pattern (New Populism)

In this style, "populist" is used as an electoral strategy to mobilize voters to gain their support for a particular political party. This populist strategy relies on a charismatic leader who can connect with marginalized and disorganized audiences. These masses are usually poor and unemployed and inhabit urban and slum areas such as street vendors and market traders, and they are often young and old. Africa's neo-populists have tried to present themselves as the "voice of the people" as they go into those slums and urban slums, which has created a broad political support base for them in ethnically and culturally diverse urban areas. These leaders, however, used their ethnic and linguistic affiliation to win the support of their followers in rural areas as well. There is no doubt that these political promises have resonated with many members of the disadvantaged and marginalized classes who were neglected by the previous ruling elites (Resnick, 2015; Makulilo, 2013; Fölscher et al., 2021).

Perhaps the most prominent features of the new populist discourse in Africa is that it is hostile to the political elite that is characterized by corruption and inability to achieve, on the one hand, and its release of political promises related to alleviating the social exclusion of disadvantaged and marginalized social segments by improving living standards, providing job opportunities, and so on. From the demands of the urban poor in particular, on the other hand. Suppose the opposition parties in African countries have used these populist strategies to win elections, as with Michael Sata in Zambia and Abdullah Wade in Senegal. In that case, some ruling parties have also used them to take advantage of the divisions within them, and perhaps the case of Jacob Zuma in South Africa is a clear example.

President Jacob Zuma adopted a populist strategy that enabled him to reach poor and marginalized urban areas. Zuma's political speech was able to combine charismatic features with anti-elitist propaganda. Accordingly, the general picture has become that the African National Party, under the leadership of Zuma, has moved away from the elitism of Thabo Mbeki, whose political discourse has constantly perpetuated the image of the "philosopher" ruler. As for President Zuma's case, it focused on the "ordinary man" and his problems, which means opposing the discourse of exclusion. And social marginalization.

Zuma defined himself as an uneducated man of the ordinary people. Contrary to the model of political discourse adopted by President Mbeki, the impression prevailing among many people, especially those deprived of education, is that President Zuma is one of them. He also resorted to adherence to traditional customs such as polygamy, in addition to using traditional songs and dances to attract the support of the masses. With his hostile attitude towards neo-liberal thought, Zuma succeeded in recalling what he wanted from the memory of the period of the national struggle. For example, he would always chant in his election campaigns the song "Bring me the machine gunner" to emphasize his national role in combating the apartheid regime and his determination to complete the process of liberation and liberation for the ordinary citizen.

In sum, it can be said that one of the most prominent factors that led to the emergence of this populist style in African leadership is the increase in urbanization rates with low labor-intensive growth rates in some African countries. These demographic and social factors have increased employment rates in the informal sectors and lower levels of public services while increasing inequality in urban areas.

Undoubtedly, these conditions allowed some smart politicians to seize them and win over those angry at the continuation of the status quo.

Years of economic depression and the failure of externally imposed development strategies in Africa during the 1980s and 1990s led to a massive exodus of rural populations to the cities. The recent rates of capital investment in African cities have shown their orientation towards commercial, financial, and tourism projects instead of focusing on industrial projects that provide many job opportunities. In this case, the logical consequence would be an increase in poverty and an erosion of the urban middle class.

One can see these effects in most African cities that suffer from severe crises in providing basic services such as clean water, electricity, housing, and lack of job opportunities. For example, about 72% of the urban population in Africa lives in slums. Some estimates indicate that from 2000 to 2010, the population of slums in Africa increased from 103 million to 200 million people.

In contrast to the experience of Latin America, which witnessed the resurgence of populism again, the new generation of populists in Africa did not come from outside the ruling elite. However, it emerged and gained its experience from practice within the governance institutions, which may apply to many cases such as Zambia, South Africa, and Kenya. On the other hand, the relatively recent partisan experience in Africa compared to Latin America has made populist strategies an alternative or complement to the weakness of the party structure and the faltering democratic transition in Africa.

Models that explain populism as a policy response to the interests of the urban poor cannot explain the instability of populist mobilization processes. Therefore, focusing on reality and political practice is more beneficial. Some African experiences of populist performance show that populists usually do not provide clear policies for dealing with passive audiences. Therefore, they often have to improvise. For example, the story of the rise of the *Zambian Patriotic Front (PF)* in 2006 and its development over the following decade provides an important example of the instability of populism as a policy response in African reality. The populist aspect of the PF faded by 2008 and gradually disappeared in parallel with the ill health of its leader, Michael Sata, and his eventual death in 2014. Nevertheless, the party was able to maintain its electoral success. Fraser (2017) describes Zambia's "post-populist" legacy of hyper-partisanship, violence and authoritarianism. Intolerance has been justified in the populist moment as a reflection of anger at inequality; It then becomes free of any program.

What is the relationship between populism and democratic transformation?

Some populist experiences in Africa have shown that it was more Mussolini-style than being a Marxist. Perhaps this means its contempt for democracy as a supreme value that governs the relationship between the ruler and the ruled (Arato & Cohen, 2022). President Museveni, who came from outside the ruling political class and adopted anti-political populist rhetoric, established an autocratic style that did not believe in the peaceful transfer of power (Carbone, 2005). Also, Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade, who came from the opposition ranks on the shoulders of the masses to reach the throne, tried to establish a political kingdom where his son would succeed him. However, the popular protest campaigns aborted his political project.

Nevertheless, the new populism in Africa embodies in some of its applications the rules of democratic practice. Populist strategies increase the political system's ability to represent disadvantaged and marginalized social strata. This aspect is paramount in low-income countries where most people lack the economic resources or social relations necessary to cast their voices to the ruling class. The electoral competition to win the votes of marginalized urban residents may push them to educate them politically so that they can choose between the political alternatives presented to achieve their long-term interests.

On the other hand, populist strategies, unlike One-Man Parties, help to inject new fuel into African parties and reconsider democratic tools as the best way to communicate citizens' choices and demands to elected officials.

The South African election in 2024 illustrates how populist parties capitalize on economic and social discontent by scapegoating foreign nationals, ultimately weakening the dominance of traditional parties like the ANC (Booyesen,2024). Similarly, Senegal's 2024 election highlighted the tension between populist movements and entrenched political elites, with opposition candidate Ousmane Sonko mobilizing youth support through anti-corruption rhetoric while facing politically motivated legal challenges. In Comoros, President Azali Assoumani's rule exemplifies how populist authoritarianism undermines democratic institutions through media suppression and opposition crackdowns. The rise of external influence in Côte d'Ivoire's 2025 elections, particularly Russian-backed disinformation campaigns, reveals how populism intersects with global geopolitical strategies to erode democratic trust. Meanwhile, Tanzania's ruling CCM party has embraced populist tactics internally, reinforcing its grip on power through media restrictions and political suppression. These cases demonstrate that electoral populism in Africa is not a monolithic phenomenon but rather a complex and evolving strategy used by both opposition and ruling parties to mobilize support, challenge democratic norms, and, in some cases, entrench authoritarian rule.

In any case, the implications of electoral populism on the democratic transition in Africa remain ambiguous and unclear. Could these electoral strategies lead to structural shifts in political party systems to become more program-oriented than One-Man-centered? Undoubtedly, the democratic, social, and economic transformations that most African countries are witnessing will always call for the type of political populism to mobilize the broad masses and obtain their support and support. This means that citizens' expectations and voting behavior will be a milestone in the future of Africa's democratic transition.

CONCLUSION

The experience of post-independence African populism, despite its diversity, has shown itself to be full of contradictions. Populist thought was portrayed as inherently hostile to elitist politics but eventually created new elites who profited from changing conditions. Populism has also claimed that it takes the side of "ordinary people" against the dominant oligarchs, so it fails to realize its simplest aspirations to live a dignified life. The experience of African populist regimes with the issue of democracy has been ambiguous and unclear. The issue of "cleaning the house" and fighting corruption only led to more looting and the theft of the money of the simple and deprived people. Populist leaders often use symbols, propaganda, and exaggerated promises to gain popular support. In some cases, this may amount to the use of intimidation.

In any case, examining the diversity of African populist experiences leads to two notable results: the erosion of the legitimacy of populist leaders and their governance systems. Perhaps the most obvious reason here is the failure to achieve the demands and aspirations of the broad masses. This sometimes amounted to a popular demonstration demanding a change in the ruling regime. The second result is represented in the transformation of populism into a type of authoritarian rule, especially when the leader, in this case, resorts to violence to confront the demands for change. Given the ethnic and linguistic component in the new populist trends in Africa, where the populist leader resorts to his base of support to which he belongs to defend its interests, this situation may reach the point of civil war.

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ⁱ The case of the late Zambian President Michael Sata, who took office in 2011, presents an example of the new populism in Africa. With his populist rhetoric, Sata managed to end two decades of The Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) rule. He capitalized on popular discontent with unemployment and poor service to rally mainly urban voters around the new party he formed in 2001, known as the Zambian Patriotic Front's (PF). As a result of his behavior in the successive electoral campaigns he fought before winning the presidency, and due to his opposition to the presence of foreign companies, especially the Chinese, in his country, many writers considered him a populist leader.