

# Expertise, Populism, and White Identity Politics

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The legitimacy of modern democracies depends on balancing diverse elements, including scientific expertise, political participation, and public representativeness. The growing influence of authoritarian populism in Europe and the United States is undermining efforts to balance these elements. Authoritarian populists have recruited followers in part by challenging established expertise on topics such as vaccines and climate change. And they have resisted efforts to make public institutions more broadly representative of all residents, often by appealing to dominant racial, ethnic, and religious identities. In this respect, populism today amounts to a form of identity politics: white identity politics. More broadly, authoritarian populists make explicit what has long been obvious to many nonwhites: modern Western democracies, founded on racialized slavery and colonialism, have been basically white democracies. Those socially defined as white have enjoyed systematic advantages over nonwhites, and many of the basic values and institutions of modern science and democracy have reflected and enabled white supremacy, intertwined with gender, class, and other forms of power. To be sure, racial politics in the United States cannot be equated with debates over *Zwarte Piet* in the Netherlands, migrants in Germany, or headscarves in France. Nonetheless, commonalities appear in certain aspects of authoritarian populism, and also in the aspirational color-blindness of many white liberals. The latter often portray themselves as the racially unmarked guardians of universal ideals of science and democracy, implicitly reinforcing whiteness as the unspoken standard to which nonwhites are expected to aspire. The racism of dominant scientific and political institutions has been repeatedly challenged, of course, not only by racialized minorities but also by some whites. Whites who fight racism, not just as individuals but as whites, suggest the possibility of antiracist forms of white identity politics. This presentation will examine different versions of populism and white identity politics, focusing on their implications for the politics of science and expertise.