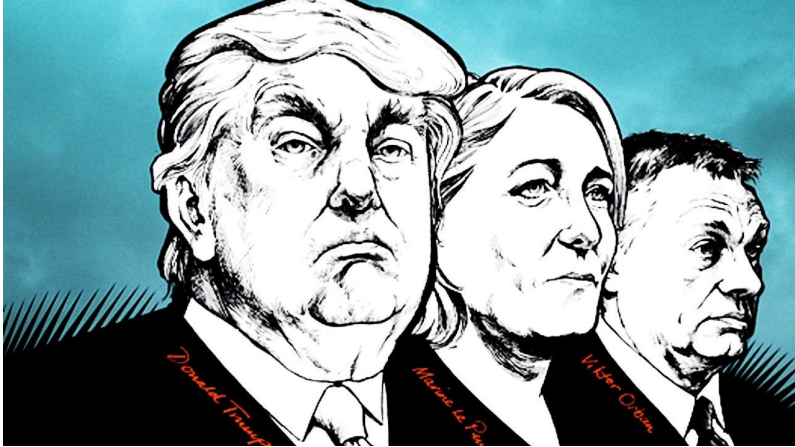


# Diálogos en inglés 2: What is Populism?

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## Intro

Welcome to English dialogues.

In the last 18 months we've experienced 3 extraordinary events: Brexit, Trump and Catalonia. Many experts say that these events were caused by the emergence of populism but those same experts can't agree what populism is exactly. In Today's dialogue Rokeby and Jack explore the phenomenon of populism and arrive at a concrete definition. Remember, the transcription of this audio, the list of vocabulary and conversation questions are free. Visit our website. Thankyou.

## The Dialogue

**JACK:** Okay, rokeby, what is populism?

**ROKEBY:** Populism. Well, if democracy like Abraham Lincoln described it: government of the people, for the people, by the people, then populism is like government of the stupid, by the stupid, for the stupid.

**JACK:** Come on rokeby, give us your real explanation.

Look, Jack, I'm half American, educated in Britain and I live in Spain. In one year I had to deal with Brexit, Trump and Catalanian independence...it's hard for me to talk about populism without being angry. Government of the people is a noble and beautiful thing, but the problem is that as the years

2016 and 2017 showed, **all it takes** is a few **adverts** on Facebook and then the people start voting for **all sorts of** crazy shit...like populism.

*It's Hard For Me - Es muy difícil para mí*

*All It Takes - Lo único que hace falta*

*Adverts - Anunc*

*All Sorts - Todo tipos*

**JACK: Ok, then...so give me a dictionary explanation of populism instead of the Rokeby biography.**

Well, a dictionary definition would be this. Populism is a form of government where decisions are made and **policies** are formulated based on what's popular.

*Policies - Políticas*

**JACK: Really? Well, if that's the case...populism sounds fantastic. Everybody wants the government to do things that are popular.**

**ROKEBY:** That's true. But it **turns out** that what's popular **amongst** the people isn't necessarily what's good for the people. Think about this example.

Imagine there's a new director at the local school who wants to be popular with the children. So, he promises to give them free chocolate during class, a bottle of fanta with lunch, and a big bag of sweets to take home. This promise makes him popular...but of course all that sugar will make the kids **turn out** fat. Therefore, the policy is popular..but would be bad for their **health** in the **long term**.

So, if we transfer this idea to politics, populists get votes by promising people something they want...i.e. - something that's popular - but unfortunately, this popular thing has negative consequences for the country in the long term.

*Turn Out - Resulta que*

*Amongst - Entre*

*Turn Out - Salen*

*Health - Salud*

*Long Term - A largo plazo*

*Deal With - Enfrentar*

**JACK: But if that's populism. Why is it so often associated with racism and other negative ideas?**

**ROKEBY:** Well, let's imagine that the school director - like many populists - has to **deal with** economic reality and there's no money for free chocolate. Now, he's got a problem. So what does he do?

Well, he explains to the children that **he was just about to buy** the chocolate and fanta when he received a call from the department of education, telling him that some immigrant families arrived in town and the immigrants had no money to pay for their children's text books and so all the money for the chocolate went to buy books for the new immigrant students. Fucking immigrants! And then the kids start thinking of all that chocolate they've lost and they also say, "fucking immigrants."

So, populism often leads to racism or homophobia or islamophobia because the populist has to **blame** someone when he breaks his promises...and the people he blames are usually another race or class or religion or sexuality.

*He Was Just About To Buy - Estaba a punto de comprar*  
*Blame - Culpar*

**JACK: Mmm... your logic is impeccable...but **while** giving free chocolate is clearly popular, I can't see what's popular about criticising immigrants.**

**ROKEBY:** Well, in the first example the populist was promising something material - more chocolate - but in the second he gives the people something emotional: someone to blame. Humans need to understand why they don't have jobs, why they're depressed, why they're poor etc....and the populist gives them an answer: the fucking immigrants (/gays/elites/foreign governments etc.)

And that's why populism is so dangerous for democracy...because - when the populist creates a hate group, he immediately divides society into two irreconcilable blocks and destroys the tolerance which democracy depends on.

But that's not the only problem: not surprisingly, this division affects the economy, but in order to maintain his power base the populist has to continue with the hate and use economic corruption to direct **resources**, jobs and privileges to his supporters. This corruption causes **even deeper** economic problems and the populist starts to lose his majority support in the country. That's when he **turns to** oppression instead of populism.

Venezuela is a classic example. It started out with a series of populist policies - giving **stuff** to poor people - but eventually divided the country, destroyed the economy, and when there were no more populist solutions - the government turned into a dictatorship.

*While - Mientras*  
*Resources - Recursos*  
*Even Deeper - Aun más profundo*  
*Turns To - Recurrir a*  
*Stuff - Cosas*

**JACK: But that's the part I don't understand. If a populist likes to do things that are popular...how can he tolerate being a dictator...a person who's so clearly unpopular?**

**ROKEBY:** Your **error** is to think that he loves popular policies because he loves the people. No, the populist loves power...and is so desperate *for* power that he doesn't think of principles or ideology

when he makes policies...he just offers people what they want...**in order to** get that power. He's a political prostitute. So, what made him a populist in the first place is that he'll do anything to gain power, meaning that when populism doesn't work anymore he turns to a different method: oppression.

*Error - Error*

*In order to - para*

**JACK: So, if the job of a government is to make decisions for the good of the country...then populism is a cancer of the decision making process because the motive for all decisions is not the good of the country but to **gain** and maintain power.**

**ROKEBY:** Yes. Exactly. And the problem is that the disease **spreads** and makes the entire political system dysfunctional. For example, because experts can easily show how bad his policies are, the populist starts attacking experts and educated people - accusing them of a conspiracy against the people - which creates another division. Then he starts a war against the media because they also expose him. Finally, when that doesn't work, the populist **launches** a program of distractions and **controversies** to make sure that people stop talking about policy and start talking about the distractions. Trump, for example, knows that the moment he insults someone that he will dominate the news. I mean, seriously Jack, at every level of society and government populism causes dysfunction.

*Gain - Ganar*

*Spreads - Propagarse*

*Launches - Lanza*

*Controversies - Controversias, Polemicas*

**JACK: So if populism is the disease...what's the cure? Because it seems to be spreading around the world?**

**ROKEBY:** Well, democracies become infected because the minds of their voters become infected; let's not forget it was a democratic referendum which gave Hitler absolute power in 1934. The only way to avoid these infections is to have an excellent education system which transmits positive values - love, peace, tolerance - and the rational thinking that makes them resistant to propaganda and manipulation.

**JACK: Final question. Considering that populism is so dangerous...do you still believe in democracy, Rokeby?**

**ROKEBY:** My feelings about democracy are exactly the same as Winston Churchill's in 1947 when he stood up in parliament and said "It is my considered opinion that democracy is the worst form of government..."

Apart from all the others."

Hi, my name's Rokeby Lynch...let's do the listening questions. You can see the correct answer on the transcription which you can download free on vocatic.com.

## Intermediate Listening questions

### 1. What is my personal connection with populism?

I'm half american, was raised in the UK and live in Spain. Thus I experienced three major events which some people describe as populist: Brexit, Trump and Catalanian independence. *(Editor: We do not necessarily agree with this description)*

### 2. What excuse does the school director use when he can't give the chocolate he promised?

He had to spend the money on immigrants.

### 3. Why are controversies and insults important to a populist?

To distract them from talking about policies.

### 4. What is the best defence against populism?

Education.

### 5. What was Winston Churchill trying to say? (In your own words)

That democracy is far from perfect...but the other forms of government are even worse.

## Pronunciation

Today, I want to focus on a word that we just heard in today's intermediate listening exercise: - launch - (lanzar en español.) The difficult sound to pronounce in this word is the 'au' ...

- launch.

Ok...repeat the sound 'au'... and now repeat the word.

Launch...

Again... Launch

Again... Launch

This is the same sound of words like form, and born, and dawn (amanecer)

To practice this sound I want you to remember and repeat the phrase...

**I was born at dawn.**

Or, if you're feeling a little spicy...**I was born for porn.**

# Conversation questions

1. Is it insulting to the people who voted for Trump to say that populism is 'government of the stupid...by the stupid?'
2. Why do politicians in democracy tend to make decisions based on the short term. How can we - the citizens - prevent them from doing this?
3. Why did Brexit and a populist president in the US happen in 2016 and not 2000 (or any other time in recent history)?
4. Should more countries join together and create alliances like the EU, eventually creating a system of world government?
5. What changes would you make to the education system to make sure that the people had a better understanding of life, society and government?

## Outro

Ok, thank you very much. That's the end of the class. But remember, these podcasts are not only designed for listening but to stimulate conversation. In the podcast transcription there are five conversation questions about populism and international politics...discuss them in class, or with your friends, or...if you have nobody to discuss them with, then you can do a 45 minute conversation class with me, Rokeby Lynch on Skype (skype) Also, don't forget my podcast that combines vocabulary and grammar. For all these wonderful things, skype classes, podcast, transcription...visit [vovatic.com](http://vovatic.com). Thankyou... See you next week. We're going to talk about what it means to be a man in the twenty-first century.



