

Professor Paul Kenny

Professor Paul Kenny is Professor of Political Economy in the Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences at the Australian Catholic University. He received his PhD in political science from Yale University and has degrees in economics and political economy from Trinity College Dublin and the London School of Economics. Prior to joining the ACU, Professor Kenny worked at the Australian National University, where he was Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Political and Social Change. He is the author of two previous books, *Populism and Patronage: Why Populists Win Elections in India, Asia, and Beyond* (Oxford University Press, 2017), which won the American Political Science Association's 2018 Robert A. Dahl Award, and *Populism in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), in addition to numerous academic articles on populism, inequality, and other topics in comparative political economy, which have been published in the *British Journal of Political Science*, *The Journal of Politics*, and *Political Research Quarterly* among other leading journals.



Buying Power: The Economics of Populism from Ancient Greece to the Present

Wednesday 9th December (12-1pm)

To explain the success of populism, I argue in this new book, we have to think less like philosophers and more like CEOs. Rather than thinking of populism as a set of ideas summed up by the dictum, *people good, elites bad*, we can better understand its appeal across history by conceiving of it as a comparatively low cost, low engagement political strategy to win and retain power. Values and ideas may matter for an aspiring leader, but only in so far as they are useful for securing market share—or in other words, votes. Instead of mobilizing supporters through complex and expensive political parties or the selective distribution of goods and services to favored constituents, populists come to power by appealing directly to the people via mass communication. Populists thrive where the costs of reaching supporters through rallies, the mass media, and increasingly, social media are lower than the costs of cultivating links with them through parties and patronage. Applying this economic approach to the rise, fall, and rise of populism across a wide historical sweep, from Ancient Greece through interwar Europe to the present, this book draws out the lessons for the survival of democracy into the future.
