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Resolving the Populist Paradox : Politics, Perception, and Identity in the United States

Pierre Avalos
Montclair State University

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Abstract

The concept of populism is ubiquitous in the international arena. Whether in Brexit, the surge of nationalism in display across the international system, or Donald Trump's presidency, populism is a mainstay of modern social, political, and economic systems. Although it's historical and conceptual aspects are instructive, populism's most defining elements are revealed in its socioeconomic aspects. This is represented in a political-cultural model, which considers its conceptual imperatives based on the ideological approach to defining populism, and a refinement of this model that relies upon the prevalence of economic factors and cultural factors. The purpose of this research is to review the historical origins of populism in the United States, the conceptual approaches to defining it, and use an applied theory approach to reconcile the political-cultural model with ideological conceptions of populism. The salience of these features is then substantiated as it is applied to competing views regarding the United States' Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. A review of this primary document reveals its implications for the public's perception of the United States' government. Thus, this research relies on applied theory, historical review, and primary document analysis to reconcile approaches with addressing populism in the United States, and the world at large. It takes an interdisciplinary approach through the lenses of political science, economics, and sociology to contribute to methods for addressing populism.

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Resolving the Populist Paradox: Politics, Perception, and Identity in the United States

by

Pierre Avalos

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Montclair State University

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Thesis Committee:

Ian J. Drake

Digitally signed by Ian J. Drake
DN: cn=Ian J. Drake, o=MSU,
email=drake27302@yahoo.com, c=US
Date: 2018.05.01 08:46:07 -04'00'

Thesis sponsor:

Brigid Callahan
Harrison

Digitally signed by Brigid
Callahan Harrison
Date: 2018.05.01 09:01:56
-04'00'

Committee member



Committee member

J. Baldwin LeClair

5/8/2018
non-digitally sig

RESOLVING THE POPULIST PARADOX:
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A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts

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PIERRE AVALOS

Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

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Historically, popular movements have been a mainstay of democratic governance. Whether to refine their vigor through institutional checks and balances or safeguard their presence in the public square, popular movements are fastened to democracy. From the very inception of the Constitution to the movements for women's suffrage and civil rights, these movements have beckoned government authority to air their grievances and seek remedies. Some of the most noteworthy instances were a reaction to economic upheaval. For the United States, these include the constitutional crisis in the late 18th century, Black Monday in the late 19th century, the Great Depression in the 20th century, and the Great Recession of 2008. The intensity and lifespan of corresponding popular movements has increased along with advancements in telegraphy and communication technologies.

In the late 19th century, one such movement inserted the term *populism* into the U.S. political arena. Since then, the term is increasingly used in tandem with many popular movements. Yet, definitions for this term have been the subject of contentious debate in the academy and news media. Most recently, *populism* has been attached to political coalitions and figures such as Donald Trump and his campaign to Make America Great Again. As useful as this term has been for rhetorical purposes, its attachment to such figures is difficult to evaluate. Some claim that populism is the essence of democracy as it emphasizes popular rule; others claim that it is a virus that skews democratic notions of popular sovereignty. How does one go about evaluating such claims and the leaders that claim the populist mantra? This paper will provide an answer to this question as it explores the concept of *populism* as a historical phenomenon,

conceptual framework, sociopolitical narrative, and its corresponding government policies along the way.

Chapter 1 contains a brief historical review of populism and analyzes approaches to defining it. This section is the most abstract and provides a conceptual framework to guide the substance of the subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 narrows the conceptual framework by applying it to economic and cultural factors in the U.S. contemporarily. It results in a conceptual model that pertains to economic, cultural, and ideological dimensions in the U.S. political arena. Chapter 3 provides a brief review of the Trump administration's Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, its portrayal in the news media, and the public's views. This final chapter provides the context for the politics and perception of populism as it manifests in the United States today. These chapters combine to evaluate the usage of the term *populism* as it applies to Donald Trump's presidency. It is the position of this paper that in its current manifestation, populism per se exists exclusively in the citizenry but its traits are leveraged by political leaders for persuasive purposes.

Chapter 1

In recent years, electoral and policy shifts in the international system have shaken global politics: Brexit in the United Kingdom; a strong campaign by the National Front's leader in France, Marine Le Pen; the rhetoric of the Philippines' President, Rodrigo Duterte; and, strong showings by electoral candidates such as Norbert Hofer (presidential, Austria 2016), Geert Wilders (parliamentary, Netherlands 2017), Bernie Sanders (presidential, United States 2016), as well as Donald Trump's success in 2016. The ubiquity of these popular movements, the similar qualities of each, and their resonance with *the people* have reinvigorated the conceptual debate over *populism*. More importantly, the prevalence of populism in contemporary political discourse is identified as a threat to the liberal democratic order—one capable of doing irreparable damage to democratic institutions. A definition for populism is necessary to evaluate its threat potential and appropriate governmental responses. Many scholars emphasize its antagonistic nature, which pits *the people* against *the elite*, and popular sovereignty¹ against the institutions meant to safeguard it.² Other scholars suggest that populism is nothing more than a political strategy to mobilize the masses.³ These distinctions contribute to various frameworks for defining *populism*, which require identifying *the people* and *the elite*. Thus, this chapter will rely partly on a historical review and on applied theory to contribute to this effort.

¹ For the purposes of this paper, "popular sovereignty" refers to Rousseau's general will as a source of political power and authority in a polity. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau. "On the Social Contract." In *The Basic Political Writings*, Second, 156–70. Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2011: 166-167.

² See Margaret Canovan. "Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy." *Political Studies* (1999); Ernesto Laclau. *On Populist Reason*. New York: Verso, 2007; Francisco Panizza. *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*. London: Verso, 2005; Michael Kazin. *The Populist Persuasion*. New York: HarperCollins, 1995.

³ See Kurt Weyland. "Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics." *Comparative Politics* 34, no. 1 (2001).

In popular parlance, *populism* refers to an ill of the body politic that panders to its baser sentimentalities and render it susceptible to manipulation.⁴ This malaise has generally been attributed to political inefficacy and alienation that is rooted in ignorance and economic anxiety. While some political developments in the international system are fastened to such explanations, a more thorough investigation of the literature on populism reveals pertinent nuances among the approaches to defining it. This academic debate, however, is fraught with challenges, namely: identifying populism's defining qualities and filtering the anti-populist discourse that is attached to labeling a particular phenomenon as *populist*.⁵ Nevertheless, this analysis seeks to contribute to the effort to develop a framework for analyzing populism that briefly reviews the late nineteenth century to the present day. This review considers works construing populism as a political style, political ideology, and policy strategy.

Populism as a Historical Phenomenon

Michael Kazin's model traces populism's origin back to the nineteenth century. He emphasizes the role of the United States' Populist Party in 1892 through prohibition and early labor movements of the early twentieth century. Its members feared the power of private actors, like corporations and business owners, and sought the government as their ally. Such populists manifested hostility toward banks, railroads, Eastern elites, and the gold standard. They occasionally allied with labor unions in the North and Republicans in the South; it was largely a coalition of poor, white cotton farmers from the South (North Carolina, Alabama, Texas) and agitated wheat farmers from the Plains

⁴ See Panizza and Miorelli 2009.

⁵ For a full account see Yannis Stavrakakis. "Discourse Theory in Populism Research." *Journal of Language and Politics* 16, no. 4 (2017).

(Kansas and Nebraska). This Leftist, agrarian coalition, however, was policy-oriented and organized. For example, wage earners joined unions that belonged to the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to gain some control over the workplace, to claim a larger share of profits, and to attain political power.⁶ The AFL grew to include over 100 unions, which ranged from membership in the teens to the hundreds of thousands, and contributed to a labor movement that overtook the preeminence of the “industrial classes.”⁷ It is noteworthy that the U.S. Populist Party looked to government for relief; that is, its members felt government left them behind, so they petitioned it for programs and policies that served their cause. In effect, their agenda influenced economic policy reform and extended democracy while simultaneously mitigating the influence of the industrial, corporate class.

In his more recent work, Kazin attributes this influence to different strains of early American populism beginning with the “civic-nationalist” strain that sought to lessen the influence of the wealthy.⁸ The party looked to government to lessen the influence of private actors such as corporations and business owners (*the elites*). This marked a watershed in politics for the United States at the time. Not only did it insert the term *populist* into the political arena, but their activities compelled government responses: a progressive income tax, government regulation of industry, public ownership of railroads and banks, as well as union rights and an eight-hour work day for workers.⁹ Like the labor movement, Kazin details other sentiments within the Populist Party that persisted in the first part of the twentieth century such as nativism and the anti-modernism heralded

⁶ Michael Kazin. *The Populist Persuasion*. New York: HarperCollins, 1995: 49.

⁷ Ibid 52.

⁸ Michael Kazin. “Trump and American Populism.” *Foreign Affairs* (December 2016): 18.

⁹ Charles Postel. “What We Talk about When We Talk about Populism.” *Raritan* 37, no. 2 (2017): 133.

by the radio-preacher, Father Coughlin. These contributed to some relevant shortcomings associated with the movement that remain in populist discourse today. According to Kazin, a separate strain of early American populism is “racial-nationalist.”¹⁰ It was this strain that persuaded Congress to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which barred all Chinese and many Japanese workers from immigrating to the United States. Further, similar attitudes led to the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in 1915, which served as an interest group in the 1920s for rallying against the powerful liquor interests that allegedly conspired with Catholic and Jewish bootleggers in undermining Prohibition (eighteenth amendment).¹¹

It is important to note that in this chapter of populist history *the people* referred to the middle-class citizen, in this case: radical agrarians and laborers; whereas, *the elite* referred to private actors from industries such as railroads, banking, liquor and others with undue influence. The presence of economic anxiety and nationalism permeate populist discourse to date, but they fail to account for the varying political affiliations of modern populist movements. For example, Latin American politics in the 1980s marked a resurgence of populism associated with Leftist politics that scholars have disassociated with classical conceptualizations of populism.¹² By the end of the century, Hugo Chavez’s Socialist Party of Venezuela and Evo Morales’ Movimiento al Socialismo in Bolivia had assumed power in their respective countries. In Venezuela, the disregard for the economic security and social needs of the people allowed Chavez to navigate the

¹⁰ Michael. “Trump and American Populism.” *Foreign Affairs* (December 2016): 18.

¹¹ *Ibid* 20.

¹² For a full account see Kurt Weyland. “Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics.” *Comparative Politics* 34, no. 1 (2001): 1–22..

political rift between the people and supporters of neoliberalism.¹³ In Bolivia, Morales' rhetoric ruptured the country's "entire social order, history, and institutional heritage" by declaring neoliberalism, foreign intervention, and cultural/indigenous exclusion enemies of Bolivia.¹⁴ Hence, employing Kazin's *strains* as pejorative labels for the manifestation of economic anxiety and nationalism in populist movements is largely a subjective endeavor. That is, both Morales and Chavez movements were concerned with economic redistribution, which is civic-nationalist in Kazin's vernacular. Yet, both movements enacted policies to the exclusion of groups beholden to the United States, capitalism, and neoliberalism, which overlaps with the racial-nationalists. This is found in populism associated with the Right of the political spectrum as well.

By the end of the twentieth century, the Austrian legislative election disturbed the European political scene: their third party, the Freedom Party, won 26.9 percent of the vote and entered into the government in a coalition with the conservative People's Party. The far-right Freedom Party subscribes to politics of intolerance and nationalism (with roots in the country's Nazi past).¹⁵ This directly spited Europe's post-war settlement. Over the next two decades, the electoral prospects of right-wing nationalist parties inflated and deflated across Europe. In 2016, Hungary's prime minister, Victor Orbán, declared immigration a poison; Poland's Law and Justice Party, with Jaroslav Kaczyński at its helm, similarly undermined democracy and the autonomy of the courts, civil service, and news media.¹⁶ Scholars suggest that these nationalist developments in Hungary and Poland derived from their post-Soviet transitions. Finally, three elections from 2016

¹³ Francisco Panizza, and Romina Miorelli. "Populism and Democracy in Latin America." *Ethics and International Affairs* 23, no.1 (2009): 42.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Charles. "What We Talk about When We Talk about Populism." *Raritan* 37, no. 2 (2017): 134.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

demonstrated that established democracies are also vulnerable to far-right nationalism: Norbert Hofer and the Austrian Freedom Party's narrow loss on May 22, the Brexit referendum on June 23, and Donald Trump's presidential election on November 8.¹⁷ These, too, have been labeled *populist*. Thus, they frame the standoff between *the people* and *the elite* particularly; in these cases, the elite collude with enemies of the people: immigrants, Muslims, and journalists.¹⁸

Much like the early U.S. Populists, these political parties and movements employ the narrative of *the people* against *the elite*. The inclusionary and exclusionary elements of populist antagonism for these movements, however, do not fit neatly into Kazin's strains for early American populism. That is, for Morales' and Chavez' populism, the lines of exclusion closely followed economic and political divisions (such as neoliberalism and capitalism). However, these Latin American movements are not purely civic-nationalist either, as their concerns include more than just policy reform, and justify the exclusion of any groups associated with the elite. They are not a political party petitioning government, rather a party whose leader directly reconstructed the government. Alternatively, the racial-nationalist label is a close fit for the European and Trump's right-wing populism, but the label inadequately captures the economic concerns for their coalitions and focuses mainly on the groups they deem responsible. That is, the racial-nationalists share many of the desires, and concerns, for policy reform with the civic-nationalists—except that the former has focused their initiatives on groups of people they blame for their woes. Thus, although Kazin's historical review is useful for

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ A broader term, that includes the elite in its scope, is *the other*. Collectively, *the other* refers to an aggregate group that includes *the elite* as well as the groups with which *the elite* collude.

investigating the origins of populism and its influence on the concept at large, he gives inadequate attention to the social and cultural distinctions that pervade historical circumstances. In his 1995 book, *The Populist Persuasion*, Kazin develops a model that contributes to the conceptualization of populism as a political style. A style that transcends the late-nineteenth century historical conditions of populism's origins.

Populism as a Rhetorical Style

The foundation for populism's rhetorical style is evident: the narrative that pits the people—the everyday citizens, the masses, the middle class, the common-people—against the elite—the wealthy, the 1%, the upper class, the oligarchy. The groups that comprise these roles depend on the country in which the narrative is framed. An abstraction of Kazin's model for populist language in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century US includes certain elements. These include: 1) the preeminence of a “moral community” with commitments to popular self-rule, hard-working “producers,” religious faith, family values and confident plain-speak; 2) rejection of the privileged elite that hijack political power from the common citizen; and 3) demanding the mobilization of popular vigor to battle the elites and restore a just order.¹⁹ For Kazin populism is a political style which develops on an antagonistic narrative: us versus them. Unlike other scholars, he does not conceive of populism as an ideology²⁰ that consists of particular political actors with a core set of beliefs, but rather as a language coopted strategically by both ends of the political spectrum.²¹ Although abstracting from Kazin's

¹⁹ Richard D. “The Populist Persuasion and Self Rule: A Cultural History of American Democracy.” *Law and History Review* (1997): 396.

²⁰ Discussed in greater detail in the next section.

²¹ This strategic cooptation of populist language overlaps with populism as a political strategy (discussed in later section).

model does not fully encapsulate populism conceptually, it offers insight as well as overlaps with influential theoretical models for populism.

Ernesto Laclau produces such a model. To him, populism is “the very essence of the political”²² as it instills the people with “the political operation *par excellence*.”²³ In effect, populist language invokes the essence of politics to redistribute power from the elite to its proper place: the people.²⁴ Such language appeals to popular vigor through a rhetoric that makes categorical distinctions between the people and the elite. More abstractly than Kazin, Laclau establishes a process of identification for populist language that classifies the roles of the people and the elite. He contributes the *empty signifier* through this classification process.²⁵ Accordingly, a concept loses its traditional meaning and transforms into a representation of specific demands to which it has purported equivalence. Populism in this model subscribes to a logic of equivalence as well as antagonism, one that “while being a part, also claims to be a whole.”²⁶ Nationalism and nativism often employ the *empty signifier* in their rhetoric. Thus, the logic of equivalence enables a group (or coalition) to claim that they are the true representation of the whole society. In this manner, populism skews democracy’s imperatives for popular rule and

²² Ernesto Laclau. *On Populist Reason*. New York: Verso, 2007: 222.

²³ Ibid 153.

²⁴ This serves as the arena for evaluating the logic of populism. That is, populism’s central tenet is that government should reflect the pure and undiluted will of the people (true popular sovereignty). Yet, depending on political affiliation, some will claim that as government expands to satisfy group concerns and interests other group interests are affected that may be at odds with government action. Thus, as government expands more groups will mobilize to have their interests satisfied by bending government to their will. In this process, those that are well-funded and well-organized gain the most from government action. Alternatively, others claim that if government does not continuously expand to address group needs and interests, private actors with great wealth and influence will usurp the reins of social order to the detriment of many groups. It is then necessary for government to serve a meditative function for competing interests and demands.

²⁵ Ernesto Laclau. *On Populist Reason*. New York: Verso, 2007: 130.

²⁶ Ibid 245.

operates through a discourse that is anti-established order and anti-status-quo. Francisco Panizza provides insight into this aspect of discursive populism.

First, in a collection of essays on populism, Panizza elaborates on its antagonistic nature as a method of identification between form and content (the people and the people's demands, respectively) that is a product of "the very process of naming—that is, of establishing who the enemies of the people (and therefore the people itself) are."²⁷ This effectively ascribes the roles in the antagonistic narrative (*the people and the elite*) through a logic of opposition. A logic by which group identity forms reactively in opposition to other groups. In another essay, Panizza emphasizes populism's rupture with democracy,²⁸ which underscores another important component: the rhetoric of reconstruction. In the process of identifying the people and the elite, populist style employs language that conveys a necessary rupture with the existing unjust order to reconstruct a truly democratic one.²⁹ This aspect of populist style is a pertinent consideration for its manifestations as an ideology and policy strategy. That is, it subverts a society's sociopolitical norms to deliver the persuasive method that populist discourse employs: the antagonistic narrative. By reframing the political narratives in a society, populist discourse becomes a viable option for a multitude of political actors with varying strategies and ideologies.³⁰

In summary, Kazin's model for populist language underscores the presence of an antagonistic narrative: us versus them (the people versus the elite). This language is coopted by both ends of the political spectrum. Laclau offers an abstract theoretical

²⁷ Francisco Panizza. *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*. London: Verso, 2005: 3.

²⁸ Discussed in greater detail in the ideology of populism.

²⁹ Francisco Panizza, and Romina Miorelli. "Populism and Democracy in Latin America." *Ethics and International Affairs* 23, no.1 (2009): 41.

³⁰ This is a criticism for this approach to understanding populism (discussed in a later section).

model for this narrative that yields a process for classifying the roles that comprise it. He provides the *empty-signifier* that takes on varied content and endows previously established precepts with new meaning. This new meaning contributes to a logic of equivalence as well as antagonism. Panizza's insight on political antagonism bridges Laclau's theory with its practical implications for democracy: the rhetoric of reconstruction and restoration of a truly democratic order. This restoration, or redemption, is a factor for the next approach to defining populism.

Populism as an Ideology

For the purposes of this chapter, political ideology refers to a set of opinions, ideas, principles, ethical boundaries, and beliefs that explain how society should work. Typically, it yields a framework for the optimal social order. It is common for countries to subscribe to a particular method of governance and have various ideologies. Although democracy and populism are separate entities, scholars compare them. Although he does not conceive of populism as an ideology, some of Panizza's contributions are useful in this regard. In an essay, Panizza and Miorelli emphasize that both democracy and populism seek to enact the sovereign rule of the people but diverge in their responses to majority-minority relations, the protection of individual rights, and definitions of an enduring political order.³¹ As an ideology is understood as a framework for how society should work, those that subscribe to it endorse a particular political logic. This analysis has laid the foundation for this logic—antagonism and equivalence that justifies exclusion. Such is Panizza and Miorelli's insight: "exclusion of the 'enemies of the

³¹ Francisco Panizza, and Romina Miorelli. "Populism and Democracy in Latin America." *Ethics and International Affairs* 23, no.1 (2009): 39.

people' can be justified in the political logic of populism."³² This an important contrast with democratic governance as the analysis explores populism as an ideology.

Perhaps the most apt contribution to this approach is made by Cas Mudde. In addressing what he conceives of as *The Populist Zeitgeist*, Mudde rejects conceptualizations of populism as a pathology that is a function of corrupted democratic ideals.³³ Mudde builds his definition for populism partly on its conceptualization as an antithesis to democracy. Thus, populism's antagonistic nature resurfaces. To Mudde, populism is

a [thin-centered] ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.³⁴

In effect, populist ideology seeks to restore the significance of the particularities and values of its proponents. Its thin-center is a defining quality of populism as an ideology. Unlike socialism or liberalism, the agenda is "moralistic rather than programmatic."³⁵ This distinction speaks to the moral and normative judgments inherent to the antagonistic narrative: *the elite* have infused government institutions with their culture and values to be imposed on society. As such, the sociopolitical order is ripe for their agenda. Other thicker ideologies are deeply rooted in political traditions that yield methods for conceiving of social, economic, and cultural issues. In Mudde's hypothesis, populism

³² Ibid 41.

³³ For a full account see Pierre-André Taguieff, 'Political Science Confronts Populism: From a Conceptual Mirage to a Real Problem', *Telos*, 103 (1995).

³⁴ Cas Mudde. "The Populist Zeitgeist." *Government and Opposition* (2004): 543.

³⁵ This is a citation from Peter Wiles, 'A Syndrome, Not a Doctrine: Some Elementary Theses on Populism', in Ionescu and Gellner, *Populism. Its Meanings and National Characteristics*, p. 167 from Cas Mudde. "The Populist Zeitgeist." *Government and Opposition* (2004): 544.

attaches itself to other thicker ideologies that oppose the dominant group's. Populist ideology has its roots in the competing perspectives for a just, enduring political order. Those that comprise the antagonistic narrative endorse conflicting perspectives on prevailing methods for addressing social, economic, and cultural issues. Populism demands a change in the dominant political traditions of the established order. This transcends the debate over the breadth of government institutions and emphasizes instead the cultural particularities and moral values inherent to those institutions. Thus, one must consider the normative qualities of populist ideology.

Margaret Canovan emphasizes that as an anti-system ideology, populist anger is not just toward institutions but also the opinion-leaders in scholarship and the media.³⁶ This echoes the competing moral views mentioned previously, with an emphasis on the animus that develops among the people as the elite impose their views on them. Scholarship and the media are therefore avenues by which the elite's views proliferate. Hence, it follows that when a country subscribes to socialism, populism's thin-center attaches itself to economic liberalism, and vice versa. Canovan's most fruitful contribution for this analysis, however, is in the struggle between democracy's two faces: one *pragmatic* and the other *redemptive*.³⁷ Pragmatically, democracy's imperatives for the sovereign rule of the people are vested in institutions that safeguard it; but, deep at the core of the redemptive face is a distaste for institutional policies that obscure the people's sovereignty.³⁸ As marginalized groups grow impatient with the institutions they submit to, skepticism festers over the ability of institutions to represent their constituency. Thus,

³⁶ Margaret Canovan. "Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy." *Political Studies* (1999): 3.

³⁷ Ibid 9.

³⁸ Ibid 13.

populist animus spawns from the gap between democracy's two faces as the actors involved compete for an enduring political order. Proponents of populist ideology seek to stake their claim to the representative mechanisms in government institutions and the criteria by which they must be redeemed. Canovan's insights consist of relevant normative concerns, which permeate current political developments that bear the populist label.

In summary, although they do not conceive of populism as an ideology, Panizza and Miorelli contribute an important insight: both democracy and populism seek to enact the sovereign will of the people. The realization of the people's sovereignty is the main thrust of the antagonism between the people and the elite, as the former insists that politics reflect their culture and moral judgments, which forms the thin-center of populism's ideology according to Mudde. The thin-center refers to populism's capacity for attaching itself to any combination of programmatic agendas by which its proponents can reclaim their representation. This normative quality shifts the discussion to *the people's* efforts to define the agenda for democracy's redemption as contained in pragmatic institutional mechanisms. According to Canovan, populism is the progeny of the struggle between democracy's pragmatic and redemptive faces. Hence, populist ideology is comprised primarily of opposition, if the status-quo consists of elaborate governmental machinery, the machine must be reduced to quell the populist animus, and vice versa.

Populism as a Political Strategy

Rather than focus on the logic of equivalence, opposition, and antagonism of the ideational and discursive approaches, some scholars focus on the charismatic (or

personalistic) leaders that co-opt these components to build a coalition of support and mobilize it. Such scholars conceive of populism as a political strategy. Prominent among them is Kurt Weyland. According to him, populism is, “a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks to exercise government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers.”³⁹ Weyland’s definition is a response to the subtypes of populism that have surfaced in the last century. The subtypes include leaders whose bases of support either have a “more collective, public character or consists of a dispersed set of private individuals,” or “an imagined singular actor, whom [leaders] convoke to collective manifestations in public.”⁴⁰ In effect, the former is the base to which leaders appeal by claiming to represent a society’s collective will, and the latter is the base to which leaders appeal by claiming to represent an “aggregation of individual will.”⁴¹ Weyland contributes a typology which classifies the type of ruler and base of support that coalesce through populist strategy.⁴² As such, the strategy is a function of the polity’s prevailing political commitments (which is to be opposed by the leader) and the leader’s ability gain mass support.

In Benjamin Arditi’s response to Margaret Canovan, he provides insight on the role of leaders in populist strategy. He offers a supplement to Canovan’s conceptualizations of populism in which he likens populism to a “spectre of

³⁹ Kurt Weyland. “Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics.” *Comparative Politics* 34, no. 1 (2001): 14.

⁴⁰ Ibid 15.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² For a full account see Kurt Weyland. “Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics.” *Comparative Politics* 34, no. 1 (2001): 13 Table 1.

democracy”⁴³ rather than a shadow. The appearance of this specter is sporadic and unpredictable (unlike a shadow) that rises from the gap between democracy’s institutional pragmatism and efforts to redeem the people’s sovereignty. Leaders appeal to individuals in this gap to gain support. The susceptibility of the resulting coalition to influence by the leader is the specter’s most ominous consequence according to Arditì. He invokes Hobbesian social contract theory to convey that an “exchange of obedience for protection turns into a passionate allegiance to a political grouping in exchange for jobs and security.”⁴⁴ The resulting insight into populist leaders conveys their significance in this approach: “the centrality of leaders and their direct rapport with the ‘common man’ transforms them into something akin to infallible sovereigns, in that their decisions are unquestionable because they are theirs.”⁴⁵ That is, the magnified importance of leaders to a populist movement threatens democratic checks on power and mechanisms for accountability. Much like Weyland’s, this insight emphasizes the significance of the relationship between political leaders and their base in populist strategy.

Although Arditì does not conceive of populism as a political strategy, his concern over the supremacy of leaders overlaps with Weyland’s assertion that populism is a strategy employed by political leaders. Weyland departs from Arditì in the former’s identification of policy trends among populist leaders. That is, Weyland stresses the political commitments of the existing regime, the charismatic leader’s ability to command “unorganized mass support,” and the socioeconomic class divisions of the polity.⁴⁶

⁴³ Benjamin Arditì. “Populism as a Spectre of Democracy: A Response to Canovan.” *Political Studies* 52 (2004): 141.

⁴⁴ Ibid 143.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Kurt Weyland. “Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics.” *Comparative Politics* 34, no. 1 (2001): 6-8.

Therefore, the leader's ability to siphon mass discontent to rally against existing political arrangements is imperative to populist strategy. For the purposes of this chapter, this approach to populism is instructive, but the emphasis on a leader's abilities in organizing mass support bolsters the significance of the ideational and discursive approaches. Such is a point of emphasis in the chapter's conclusion.

Conclusion

The objective of this section is to reconcile the three approaches to defining populism; in doing so, this section will produce a framework for discussing populism further. This necessitates an identification of the overlaps and conflicts among the three approaches. Further, a historical example is in order for illustrative purposes. Prior to this exercise, however, the criticisms of the three approaches must be discussed.⁴⁷

First, the discursive and ideational approaches to defining populism have been criticized as being too broad and abstract. That is, it brings a wide range of political leaders that employ oppositional strategies rhetorically under the populist banner. For example, many presidents in U.S. history have declared the existing order bankrupt and offered to repair democracy as an appeal to the populace for support.⁴⁸ Although some examples do not remain after being subjected to a composite of the conceptual criteria, the criticism remains. It persists in assertions made by the authors. In a premise for his model, Laclau conflates populism with politics when he asserts that it is "the very

⁴⁷ For a full account of the criticisms, see Noam Gidron, and Bart Bonikowski. "Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda." Working Paper. Harvard University, 2013.

⁴⁸ Examples of this rhetoric include: Theodore Roosevelt's rhetoric on the "malefactors of wealth" that neglect the public, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's declaration that monopolies and class antagonism were "enemies of peace," or even war rhetoric employed by Lynden Johnson (on poverty), Richard Nixon (on drugs), George W. Bush (on terror).

essence of the political.” This makes the terms *populism* and *politics* effectively interchangeable and thus, analytically indistinguishable.

The political antagonism cited similarly conflates the ideational and discursive approaches.⁴⁹ The former focuses on the normative agenda associated with Mudde’s thin-center hypothesis, and the latter on identifying the rhetorical roles that comprise the antagonistic narrative; however, the rhetoric used to appeal to a base is arguably an appeal to that base’s normative agenda.⁵⁰ Here, Panizza’s insight on the process of identification based on *form* and *content* overlaps with insights from the political strategy approach. Therefore, this criticism applies to the political strategy approach as well. That is, Weyland’s definition emphasizes a leader’s ability to exercise government power by mobilizing a large base of support. The criticism for this approach is not in content or form, but rather in its self-sufficiency. In this model, the leader’s ability to mobilize is a product of appeals to considerable number of followers. These appeals must be made by co-opting a rhetorical style or ideological content (or both). As such, the role of the populist leader contains the phenomena observed by the other approaches. Rather than detract from these approaches, these criticisms create overlap that yields analytic criteria for populism.

The overlap created by these criticisms demonstrates that they are not mutually-exclusive. Thus, a framework for populism should include elements from all three. The early American populists’ influence illustrates the interdependence of the three approaches. By 1892, the Populist Party, a Leftist coalition of agrarians and laborers,

⁴⁹ All authors in the ideological and rhetorical approaches to populism rely on the narrative of antagonism.

⁵⁰ Further, the same holds true when form and content are reversed; that is, when making ideological appeals to a base, a particular rhetoric is used. Is it then the rhetoric or ideology that is populist—or both—and which came first?

formed to demand government expansion and reclaim the undue influence that wealthy patriarchs had seized. The populist sentiments persisted into the twentieth century as did the proliferation of government responses that culminated in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's (FDR) election, the New Deal, and the Administrative State. Only after the formation of the Administrative State in 1946, did populist discourse begin to shift from Left to Right as "liberal elites" became the enemy of "the people."⁵¹ The migration of populist discourse across the political spectrum supports Canovan's description of democracy's two faces. In this time, charismatic and persuasive figures such as Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and FDR demonstrated the significance of leaders as political strategists; the anti-establishment ideology that attached itself to progressive liberalism and later conservatism; as well as the rhetoric employed to build coalitions of support during early American populism, demonstrate the interdependence of the three approaches.

This example, as well as the literature reviewed, establishes that populism is a sociopolitical movement that:

1. Results from a void created by the struggle for the legitimate representation of the constituency in government institutions.
2. Takes the form of an ideology with a purely normative agenda set against the established socioeconomic and political order.
3. Engages in a rhetorical style that relies on an antagonistic narrative, which pits "the people" against "the elite;"

⁵¹ Michael Kazin. *The Populist Persuasion*. New York: HarperCollins, 1995.

- a. The roles of this narrative are determined by identifying the people's demands, which results in the identification of the opposition to these demands ("the elite" or more broadly, "the other") and,
4. Coalesces into a base of support that is mobilized by a persuasive and charismatic leader that co-opts (or adopts) the normative agenda of the people.

As the populist pendulum swings from Left to Right, and the time increments for its span becomes increasingly compressed, populism's presence may lurk as a permanent fixture for democratic governance. Still, to discuss more practical and policy-oriented concerns this framework requires a narrower frame of reference. The next chapter applies these criteria to the most recent wave populism in the United States. Therein, the framework will be used to evaluate President Donald Trump's role in the narrative.

Chapter 2

The consolidated conceptual model in the previous chapter serves as a framework to craft a workable definition for populism in the United States today. This chapter will focus on distilling certain aspects of this framework as they pertain to socioeconomic conditions in the contemporary United States. Three such aspects are particularly important in that regard: populism's ideologically-thin center, ascribing the role of *the people* in the antagonistic narrative, and the role of the charismatic leader. Several socioeconomic factors in the United States today create a ripe environment for the populist movement: the decline of the middle class, an increasing concentration of power⁵² in society's elite, and a cultural shift toward the resentment of newcomers that are allegedly (empowered by the elite) usurping the reins of popular sovereignty. When these socioeconomic factors are parsed through the lens of the conceptual framework, a definition for populism emerges. Populism is a claim to representation by the *sociocultural low*⁵³ that forms reactively to the perceived threat against their political self-determination. To understand the scope of this definition, it is necessary to review the factors associated with cultural identity and material interests that combine to reinforce populism in the United States. Thus, this chapter will present those factors, a two-dimensional model that accounts for both, and contribute a new dimension for evaluating the presence of populism in the United States.

⁵² Used in this context to connote considerable influence politically, socially, and/or financially.

⁵³ Pierre Ostiguy, and Kenneth M. Roberts, "Putting Trump in Comparative Perspective: Populism and the Politicization of the Sociocultural Low." *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 23, no. 1 (2016).

Material Interests

In 2014, Francis Fukuyama declared that we live in a world of expanding and globalized democracy, which was set in motion by the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century. The Industrial Revolution was characterized by explosive economic growth and the mobilization of the middle class and new industrial working class.⁵⁴ As this trend persisted into the nineteenth century, such classes of citizens began to organize politically, and the Industrial Revolution gave way to advancements in telegraphy and production. These advances would eventually lead to a shift from an emphasis on agriculture to manufacturing—which contributed to a crisis of political representation for agrarians in the late nineteenth century (such as the early American Populists). Throughout the challenges that the Industrial Revolution imposed, it became clear that the rise and growth of the middle class was imperative for democratic stability.⁵⁵ More recently, globalization has facilitated more economic growth, the reduction of barriers to the movement of ideas, goods, investments, and people across international boundaries. For example, economic output across the globe exploded between 1970 and 2008, from \$16 trillion to \$61 trillion,⁵⁶ and in the same time the number of democracies in the international system grew from about 40 countries to almost 120.⁵⁷ As the global economy grew, and democratic governance proliferated, the United States experienced some concerning challenges.

⁵⁴ Francis Fukuyama, *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy* (New York: Macmillian, 2014), location 583, Kindle for PC.

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ World Bank Development Indicators and Global Development Finance.

⁵⁷ Figure taken from Francis Fukuyama, *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy* (New York: Macmillian, 2014), location 854, Kindle for PC.

Ironically, this expansion of democratic governance and economic growth contributed to an environment ripe for populism. Most notably, the United States began to experience a decline in the middle class and a concentration of wealth in the hands of the elite. In 1970, the top 1 percent of families took home 9 percent of GDP; in 2007, the top 1 percent of families took home 23 percent of GDP.⁵⁸ In this time, which saw the stagnation of middle-class incomes, the United States became an exemplar for income inequality.⁵⁹ Further, the reduction in costs of transportation and communication associated with globalization opened a global labor market consisting of hundreds of millions of low-skill workers. This drove down the wages, and number of jobs, for comparably-skilled workers in the United States. Unlike the technological advances in the nineteenth century, which brought about a plethora of jobs for low-skilled, middle-class workers in areas such as coal, steel, manufacturing, and construction, the technological advances of today have eliminated a large number of low-skill assembly-line jobs as automated machinery perform jobs formerly performed by the middle class.⁶⁰

Thus, from the perspective of ordinary, middle-class American citizens the odds are stacked against them and their government has willfully (or negligently) ignored their plight. This perception is reminiscent of the argument that economic modernization leads to the mobilization of social groups over time, which existing political institutions would

⁵⁸ Ibid, location 7956.

⁵⁹ According to the Human Development Index (HDI; a composite statistic of life expectancy at birth, length of average education period, and income per capita), the United States is the 10th most developed country in the world as of 2015 (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries>). Yet, the United States' GINI index (a statistic based on the comparison of cumulative proportions of the population against cumulative proportions of income they receive—0 represents complete equality and 1 represents complete inequality) measured .39 in the same year; whereas, in 2015, Turkey (the 71st most developed according to HDI) had a GINI index of .40 (<https://data.oecd.org/inequality/income-inequality.htm#indicator-chart>).

⁶⁰ Francis Fukuyama, *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy* (New York: Macmillian, 2014), location 7965, Kindle for PC.

fail to accommodate.⁶¹ It is also a constitutive element of the groups involved in populist movements: their political institutions have failed them. While many of their sentiments may be a knee-jerk reaction to inexorable changes associated with progress and modernization, their resentment toward government must be acknowledged and addressed. These sentiments are analyzed with respect to reactive cultural developments.

Cultural Identity

The extent to which the following cultural factors are reactive has its roots in the changing employment landscape. That is, both the private and public sector increasingly seek individuals with strong cognitive abilities as the global economy is progressively high-tech, fiercely competitive, involves large sums of capital, and low-skill jobs are gradually automated. Intelligence quotient (IQ) is often the measure for such cognitive ability. In 2012, Charles Murray develops on his assertions regarding the brainiest individuals (the *cognitive elite*),⁶² which often come from prestigious universities, that have great social and political influence since they satisfy the demands of the changing employment landscape. From this perspective, it is concerning that the cognitive elite are increasingly isolated from the rest of society and effectively assimilate with the already-affluent societal strata. Such a development contributes to diminishing opportunities, poor representation, and overall deteriorating quality of life for those at the bottom end of the cognitive ability distribution. Although his study relies primarily on data from the

⁶¹ For a full account, see Samuel P. Huntington, "Political Development and Political Decay," *World Politics* 3 (1965).

⁶² For a full account, see Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve*, 1994.

White middle-class, Murray's work is essential, especially when one considers Donald Trump's greatest electoral victories with Whites⁶³ and those without a college degree.⁶⁴

In establishing the increasing market value of cognitive ability, Murray quotes Bill Gates' response to a question regarding Microsoft's competitors: "Software is an IQ business...I don't worry about Lotus or IBM...Our competitors for IQ are investment banks such as Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley."⁶⁵ Still, other factors contribute to this shift such as the development of an elite-university sorting machine. This machine consists of the elite schools (the top twenty-five universities and twenty-five liberal arts colleges according to *Barrons* and *U.S. News & World Report* rating systems) which have much higher admissions standards than they did before World War II.⁶⁶ The decades following WWII contained drastic changes: a massive expansion of the enrollment in the less competitive colleges and ever-increasing admissions requirements by elite universities. The result is a type of cognitive segregation within the American college system, one that is perpetuated in the job and housing markets as well.⁶⁷ This cognitive segregation is made apparent by the development of clusters in zip codes that contain highly-educated, wealthy elites. Such "SuperZips" are not driven by malevolence or snobbery, but rather by the social homophily rooted in the human impulse to be around others with whom they can talk and be understood.⁶⁸

⁶³ K.K. Rebecca Lai, "How Trump Won the Election Polls," *New York Times*, November 8, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/11/08/us/elections/exit-poll-analysis.html>.

⁶⁴ College graduates backed Clinton by a 9-point margin (52%-43%), while those without a college degree backed Trump 52%-44%; This is by far the widest gap in support among college graduates and non-college graduates in exit polls dating back to 1980. Alec Tyson, and Shiva Maniam. "Behind Trump's Victory: Divisions by Race, Gender, Education." *Pew Research Center*, November 9, 2017. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/behind-trumps-victory-divisions-by-race-gender-education/>.

⁶⁵ Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010*. First. Massachusetts: Crown Forum, 2012.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 57.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 58-59.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 120.

Ultimately, a new upper class consisting of opinion-leaders in the academy, office-holders in government, and business people in the private sector contribute to decisions that affect the lives of the collective, yet they are isolated from the rest of society. This arrangement reinforces the perception that government fails to represent those at the bottom end of the cognitive ability distribution. In effect, it is not of much consequence if truck drivers fail to empathize with prestigious professors, producers of network news programs, or public office-holders; yet, it is worrisome if the latter groups fail to empathize with the former.⁶⁹ It is both timely, and appropriate, in the context of populism to appreciate the prevalence of these cultural factors arising from widening inequality. Although Murray treats cultural factors as determinants of societal issues, his observations deserve analysis—as reactive to impending socioeconomic circumstances—in the context of the populism in the United States.

A Political-Cultural Model for Populism

In my assessment, populism is a claim to representation by the *sociocultural low*⁷⁰ that forms as a reaction to the perceived threat against their political self-determination. In other words, it consists of the idea that society's establishment—the progeny of *the elites*—through its agents (professional politicians) has been led astray since it is out of touch with, and does not belong to, the legitimate citizens (*the people*). The sections on material interests and cultural identity briefly review the factors in the role formation of *the people* and *the establishment* (or *the other* in populist discourse) that compromise the

⁶⁹ Ibid, 101.

⁷⁰ Pierre Ostiguy, and Kenneth M. Roberts, "Putting Trump in Comparative Perspective: Populism and the Politicization of the Sociocultural Low." *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 23, no. 1 (2016).

antagonistic narrative in the United States. Populist movements tend to oscillate along an economic continuum, an ideological continuum, and a cultural continuum.

Pierre Ostiguy and Kenneth Roberts' model creates a two-dimensional space to classify populist movements and actors according to each of these continuums.

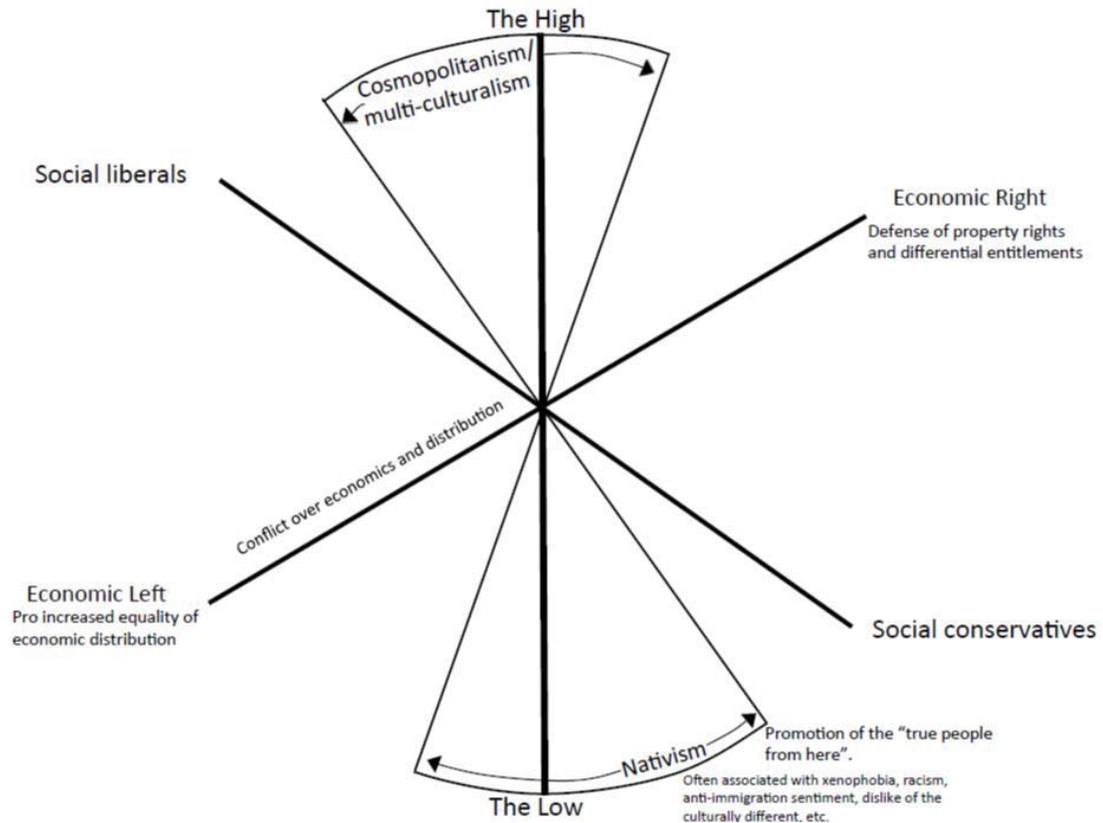
Economically, the left-right axis consists of statist and redistributive policies associated with the left as well as the free market and pro-private sector policies associated with the right.⁷¹ Ideologically, the liberal-conservative axis consists of opposition to traditional values on the liberal end, and a defense of traditional values on the conservative end.⁷²

From the cultural perspective, the high-low axis consists of cosmopolitan sentiments as well as a refined demeanor and vocabulary on the high-end, and of nativist sentiments as well as a coarse demeanor and vocabulary on the low-end.⁷³ To appreciate the significance of this model it is useful to consider populism as a social construct. That is, much like racial identity, it involves a process of group identification through opposition to other groups. This includes a reactive element to the threat of exclusion, encroachment, and oppression by such groups. Thus, this section will focus on the constitutive elements of each continuum as they pertain to populism in the United States.

⁷¹ Ibid, 29.

⁷² Ibid, 34. The liberal-conservative polarity is related to the culture wars in the United States, which is associated with values, religious identities, and related conflicts over gay rights, abortion, and family-values.

⁷³ Ibid, 30.



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Prior to plotting each constitutive element along the continuums, it is necessary to review the nuances of the high-low axis. According to Ostiguy and Roberts, it consists of politicocultural and sociocultural subdimensions. The sociocultural dimension includes a component related to manners, vocabulary, ways of being, and demeanor, and another component related to nativism and multiculturalism.⁷⁵ Those on the high-end embrace a defense of multiculturalism (often with respect to immigration) and the low-end embrace nativism (politically, in the context of immigration and culturally as being “truly from here”). Similarly, those on high tend to respond to refined, politically-correct speech and

⁷⁴ Figure taken from Pierre Ostiguy, and Kenneth M. Roberts, “Putting Trump in Comparative Perspective: Populism and the Politicization of the Sociocultural Low.” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 23, no. 1 (2016): 40.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 30.

proper demeanor; whereas, those on low prefer coarse, uncouth speech and abrasive demeanor.⁷⁶ In this dimension, it is important to account for the span of the nativist-cosmopolitan arc of the model. Nativism refers to a group of people that claim to be “truly from here;” as such, it manifests as hostility toward a foreign presence.⁷⁷ For example, even though Evo Morales’ Bolivia al Socialismo (BAS) movement corresponds to the socialist, economic left, it was hostile toward the United States’ foreign presence and influence. Similarly, although Trump’s Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement corresponds to the conservative values of the right, it is hostile toward the presence of immigrants. Nativism can be found on both ends of the social-conservative and left-right axis. Thus, if *the other* belongs to a position of socioeconomic privilege, historical dominance, and political authority as with the BAS, then the nativism will correspond to the left; if *the other* belongs to a position of cultural repugnance, viewed as socially-corrosive, and political illegitimacy as with MAGA, then the nativism will correspond to the right.⁷⁸

The final component of the high-low axis is the politicocultural dimension. It accounts for the preferences of individuals, or groups, in the distribution of authority and processes for decision-making. In it, the high-end prefers political authority vested in institutions, with rules and regulations, that insulates decision-makers from public demands and contestation; in this manner, political decisions are subject to strict procedural norms.⁷⁹ This includes public officials that tend to *play by the rules* and respect the legitimacy of established processes for executing their political strategy.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 38.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 31.

Conversely, the low-end prefers political authority vested in a personalistic leader that is willing to *break the rules* and restore the legitimacy of processes for political decision-making.⁸⁰ It follows that the low-end prefer a master-figure to rescue them from an established order that has not only been neglectful but is in collusion with global forces such as immigration.

It is important to note that Ostiguy and Roberts' conception of the sociopolitical high and low do not entail levels of education or income. For example, in their model George W. Bush is considered on the low-end even though he is wealthy and has an ivy-league education. The model relates to cultural particularities that manifest in stylistic preferences, which reflect preferences for political leadership, demeanor, communicative styles, and the manifestation of hostility toward a foreign presence. Ultimately, Ostiguy and Roberts asserts that populist strategy relies on flaunting the sociocultural low, which creates a precarious situation for United States governance. This aversion to the established processes is concerning for a liberal democratic order (such as the United States) as it relies on a sovereign state, impersonal rule of law, and mechanisms of accountability. Hence, this political-cultural model for classifying populism is a necessary tool for addressing the populist sentiments dominating modern political discourse in the United States.

Conclusion

Thus far, this analysis has applied the conceptual framework to the material interests and cultural factors comprising the antagonistic narrative for populism in the United States. While this is not a wholesale endorsement of Fukuyama, Murray, or

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Ostiguy and Roberts' explanations, elements of each combine to depict the populist narrative in the United States. Murray's observations are useful, but his cultural determinism is more of an imposition of his political views than a root-cause analysis for the factors to which it is fastened. Fukuyama's economic analysis is revealing, as is his conception of a liberal democratic order (sovereign state, mechanisms for accountability, and impersonal rule of law), but his factors undergird the cultural backlash driving populism in the United States. Ostiguy and Roberts' model (by adding the high-low axis) accounts for the culturally blue-collar make-up of Trump's base and narrows the prevalent conceptual factors from the first chapter as they manifest in the United States, however, there is an inherently hierarchical claim in his model that overlooks a contradiction in its allocation of nativism. That is, Ostiguy and Roberts maintain that if *the other* comprises a role that is viewed as socially-corrosive or repugnant, then that nativism exists on the right; yet, leftist populism in the United States similarly antagonizes those on right as socially-corrosive and repugnant.

Further, the political-cultural model demonstrates the prevalence of Mudde's thin-center hypothesis: that populism's ideology consists of a moralistic (normative) agenda as opposed to one that is programmatic. Moreover, it demonstrates that populist ideology can attach itself to more programmatic agendas to seek recompense for its grievances (i.e. economic or social conservatism and liberalism). The model also demonstrates the role of the charismatic leader in amassing a base of support; further, it specifies the logic of opposition and equivalence in amassing this base and executing populist strategy. The logic of opposition lies in the role of the existing regime's commitments (in this case the United States') that determine the manifestation of nativism in President Trump's base of

support.⁸¹ Interestingly, although the logic of equivalence has various manifestation along the conceptual ladder according to this model, the most important equivocation for this analysis is the conflation of cultural primacy with popular sovereignty.

This analysis will continue with this as an organizing principle: that an integral part of populist movements consists of cultural imperatives (particularly in the United States), which are reclaimed with *popular sovereignty* as its moniker. This principle is pivotal for the solutions that this analysis pursues. If in fact, populists are vying for social validity through exercises in political legitimacy then one of the prongs in the strategy to mitigate risk must begin with electoral politics. Namely, a U.S. political party must make an initiative to focus on unifying experiences that pervade socially-constructed identities. Populism presents an opportunity to draft the next chapter of distributive justice in the United States; however, Donald Trump's campaign strategy demonstrated that identity politics and marketing to constituents in segments of hyphenated-Americans leads to an environment ripe for division. It presents United States' political discourse with a dilemma contained in an age-old adage: where does the buck stop? This includes how government responds to groups that rely on their hyphenated-identity to invoke measures for political legitimacy.

Populist strategy can be a cathartic experience for those that resort to its political accoutrement. Yet, the United States must find a way to quell the angst embodied in its current manifestation of populism. The U.S. liberal democratic order demands it. The political-cultural model demonstrates the integral parts of populist strategy but overlooks

⁸¹ Interestingly, although Bernie Sanders' populism is not the mirror opposite of Trump's, its nativism would manifest entirely differently as his base of support has similar grievances but the narrative charges different actors with the role of *the other*. One might argue that it is in part an opposition of the sociocultural low on the populist right of the spectrum.

its conceptual implications for populism as an ideology. In applying the ideological framework for conceptualizing populism, a definition for populism emerges. Populism is a claim to representation by the *sociocultural low*⁸² that forms reactively to the perceived threat against their political self-determination. Therefore, the next chapter will evaluate the populist narrative in the United States by analyzing a linchpin in the Trump administration's strategy for economic reform: The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. This will reveal the tensions between politics and perception underpinning the populist narrative. That is, it will demonstrate the disconnect between policy initiatives, the news media's reports, and the public's views.

⁸² Pierre Ostiguy, and Kenneth M. Roberts, "Putting Trump in Comparative Perspective: Populism and the Politicization of the Sociocultural Low." *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 23, no. 1 (2016).

Chapter 3

Thus far, this study of populism corroborates a widely-accepted truism about historical instances of economic upheaval: segments of society tend to look toward strongmen to subvert incompetent institutions and restore the prevalence of *the people*. The previous chapter's emphasis on economic and cultural factors provides a framework for discussing this notion. The loss of low-skilled jobs to robotics and off-shoring is particularly important in that regard. As such, it is important to consider the U.S. government's response to these challenges. The Trump administration offered the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) as a response. Since this discussion is concerned with politics and perception, it is necessary to analyze the news media's reports on the tax plan. Moreover, the average voter is unlikely to resort to a distributional analysis provided by the Congressional Budget Office and Joint Committee on Taxation—let alone read the TCJA. The average voter is more likely to rely on the news media's reports on the plan. This chapter will provide a snapshot of the news media's reports, and review opinion polls that pertain to the public views, on the TCJA.

In 2014, a Pew Research Center study measured which news sources individuals trust according to their political affiliation. It provides a framework by which to parse through the rhetoric and data used in reporting on the tax plan. The study consists of a representative sample of 2,901 Americans with internet access.⁸³ As a result, CNN, PBS, Fox News, and Fox Business Network will be used for the purposes of this chapter. According to the study, CNN has an overall 54% trust rating for news audiences across the political spectrum, 56% trust from consistently liberal audiences, and 14% trust from

⁸³ "Journalism and Media," Pew Research Center, October 2014, <http://www.journalism.org/interactives/media-polarization/table/trust/>, accessed April 7, 2014.

consistently conservative audiences. PBS has 38% trust overall, 71% from consistently liberal, and 8% from consistently conservative; Fox has 44% overall, 6% liberal, and 88% conservative.⁸⁴ These sources were chosen due to their affiliations with different segments of the political spectrum: CNN and PBS are representative of left-leaning audiences; whereas, Fox News and Fox Business Network are representative of right-leaning audiences. A review of news reports on the tax plan reveals the prevalent factors that vary in importance depending on the news source. These factors are: the budget deficit, alternative uses for tax revenue, the emphasis on individual tax cuts as opposed to corporations, and medical costs. Prior to delving into the reports, the discussion will begin with a review of the major provisions of the TCJA.

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act⁸⁵

2018 Rates	Revised Brackets	
21%	<i>Corporations</i>	
	Single	Married Filing Jointly
10%	0 - \$9,525	0 - \$19,050
12%	9,525 - 38,700	19,050 - 77,400
22%	38,700 - 82,500	77,400 - 165,000
24%	82,500 - 157,500	165,000 - 315,000
32%	157,500 - 200,000	315,000 - 400,000

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ "The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act," December 18, 2017, <http://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20171218/CRPT-115HRPT-466.pdf>, accessed April 7, 2018.

35%	200,000 - 500,000	400,000 - 600,000
37%	Over \$500,000	Over \$600,000
2017 Rates	Original Brackets	
35%	<i>Corporations</i>	
	Single	Married Filing Jointly
10%	0 - \$9,525	0 - \$19,050
15%	9,525 - 38,700	19,050 - 77,400
25%	38,700 - 93,700	77,400 - 156,150
28%	93,700 - 195,450	156,150 - 237,950
33%	195,450 - 424,950	237,950 - 400,000
35%	424,950 - 426,700	400,000 - 600,000
39.6%	Over \$426,700	Over \$600,000

Standard Deduction		
Year	Single	Married Filing Joint
2017	6,350	12,700
2018	12,000	24,000

Personal Exemptions		
Year	Amount	Details
2017	4,050	Per Child
2018	-	-

Child Tax Credit		
Year	Credit Amount Up To	Refundable Amount
2017	1,000	1,000
2018	2,000	1,400

State and Local Taxes		
Year	Amount	Details
2017	All amounts deductible	Includes state income taxes, property taxes, etc.
2018	Capped at \$10,000	

Alimony - Rules take effect in 2019

The payer of alimony is no longer allowed an income adjustment.
the payee no longer must claim it as income.

Affordable Care Act (Obamacare)

Repeals individual mandate for full-coverage health insurance.
Penalties no longer assessed starting after 2018.
Penalties are still in effect for 2017 and 2018.

The TCJA has some noteworthy features emphasized by the news media: more benefits for corporations as opposed to the individual taxpayer and mitigating the prominence of social safety nets such as healthcare. The brackets above demonstrate that the middle and working classes will benefit from immediate savings on their taxes; however, the income ranges for each tax bracket, and the eligibility of certain deductions, reveal some interesting developments. First, contrary to obstinate insistence by President Trump and Steve Mnuchin that the top 1% will not benefit, the decrease in the highest bracket from 39.6% to 37% indicates otherwise. This is a point of criticism by opponents to the TCJA as they assert it reveals the disingenuous nature of the plan (discussed further in next section). Second, opponents cite the temporary nature of the individual tax changes—which expire on December 31, 2025 to minimize the impact of the plan on the deficit. Third, some members of the upper-middle class will pay more taxes—those earning between \$157,000 and \$195,000 will now pay a marginal rate of 32% as opposed to 28%. Fourth, the changes to the taxability of alimony shifts the tax burden to the payor and provides tax-free income to the payee. Fifth, the Congressional Budget Office

estimates that the elimination of the individual mandate will lead to 13 million individuals dropping their health insurance coverage. These features undergird the reports by pundits, analysts, experts, and officials in the sections that follow.

CNN and PBS

For the purposes of this chapter, all reports (from CNN, PBS, Fox, and Fox Business) were chosen due to their relevance based on keyword searches.⁸⁶ The reports from CNN came from its Global Public Square segment. More specifically, this segment contains interviews with Larry Summers (former U.S. Treasury Secretary) and Kevin Hassert (Chairman for the Council of Economic Advisers). Summers charged the Council of Economic Advisers with dishonest reporting.⁸⁷ He claims that most economists agree that the average dollar amount saved by workers and households (from the TCJA) is \$1,300; whereas, the Council's report maintains that it is at least \$4,000. Further, he claims that the TCJA's redistributive benefits are largely based on the assumption that the 14% cut on the corporate tax rate will compel corporations to use the revenue for its workers rather than for its savings, dividends, and stock options. In response, Hassert asserts that Summer's accusations are unbecoming as personal attacks. He also cites economic scholarship to emphasize that more than half of the budget deficit is a product of corporations transferring profits overseas to avoid taxation. Therefore, lowering the rate will make the U.S. more competitive globally and incentivize corporations to keep their profits in the domestic market. This segment demonstrates the prevalence of the distribution for corporate tax benefits and individual tax benefits. The frame of reference

⁸⁶ Keywords used include tax reform, tax plan, Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, individual tax cut, and corporate tax cut. These segments were found repeatedly at the top of the list organized according to relevance.

⁸⁷ "Global Public Square," *CNN*, October 29, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXHqilFZzpc>.

depends on whether the expert interviewed is a proponent or opponent of the TCJA. Finally, it provides the average voter with conflicting reports on the economic benefits the plan contains.

Reports from PBS demonstrate a similar shift in the frame of reference in its reports. The first segment from PBS contains an interview with Michael Bloomberg (billionaire businessman and previous Mayor of New York City). In it, he emphasizes claims that the TCJA is a political bill, lacking due diligence, for the sake of haphazardly fulfilling a campaign promise.⁸⁸ Bloomberg also emphasizes that according to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) the budget deficit will balloon by \$1.7 trillion—a reckless and avoidable consequence. Further, he acknowledges that the cut in the corporate rate is necessary but the increase in revenue should be spent on infrastructure, equipping school teachers from the poorest cities with the skills they need, and overall improvements to the public-school system. A truly redistributive benefit, according to Bloomberg, would come from negotiating with big pharmaceutical companies for lowering the costs of medication.⁸⁹ Instead, the TCJA contributes to a market in which only those that need health insurance pay for it; whereas, by its very nature, everyone should pay into health insurance while only some benefit, but all have it in the event it is needed.⁹⁰ The second segment from PBS contains an interview with Elizabeth Warren (Democratic Senator for Massachusetts). She emphasizes the TCJA’s \$2 trillion (an overstatement of the actual figure—1.7) tax cut for corporations. She claims that this is an insult to working families and a giveaway to corporate campaign donors for the

⁸⁸ “PBS NewsHour.” *PBS*, December 18, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUUpqYUVFtQ>.

⁸⁹ Since the TCJA repeals the individual mandate, the CBO estimates that 13 million citizens will lose their health insurance, which will increase the cost of health insurance.

⁹⁰ “PBS NewsHour.” *PBS*, December 18, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUUpqYUVFtQ>.

Republican party.⁹¹ She relies on historical accounts from George W. Bush administration's tax cuts that benefited primarily corporations and the 11-point reduction of the corporate tax rate in Great Britain that resulted in a reduction of wages. Like Bloomberg's insight, she maintains that the revenue could have been used for infrastructure or as a cash stimulus to low-income earners if the impetus was for individuals as opposed to corporations.

These four interviews by left-leaning news sources are indicative of the logic of equivalence used for rhetorical purposes. That is, the suggested alternative uses for the tax revenue is nestled with programmatic complications. For example, after citing some historical examples of corporate tax cuts, Warren makes a larger point about a conventional Republican agenda for redistribution: trickle-down economics. She calls it a corporate giveaway to their campaign donors that could have otherwise been used to invest in infrastructure to provide corporations with a competitive advantage, or a cash stimulus for individuals that make less \$200,000 annually. First, she embellishes the figure from \$1.7 trillion to \$2 trillion for persuasive purposes—hyperbole. Second, that figure is based on the TCJA, which means that the figure would not exist if not for the plan's provisions; in effect, she is using an estimation based on the TCJA in a hypothetical scenario that would fundamentally alter the provisions that yields the estimated figure. This is a clever thought experiment for the sake of making her point but falls short of the programmatic suggestions that would likely require different provisions in a separate plan. This holds true for the alternative uses suggested by Bloomberg. A more neutral frame of reference lies in a common factor among the interviews: the

⁹¹ "PBS NewsHour," *PBS*, November 2, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvR9ILSLjTg>.

benefits to corporations as opposed to individuals. Although Bloomberg and Warren rely on some rhetorical devices to drive this point home, it is their ultimate concern. The debate between Summers and Hassert reveals the fundamental tension between redistributive agendas: whether growth is stimulated from the bottom to the top or from the top to the bottom. That is, should relief be designed for the individual through programs for social benefits (healthcare, education, and the like—a traditionally Democratic agenda) or for the corporation (tax cuts and other incentives—a traditionally Republican agenda).

Fox News and Fox Business Network

The first representative segment for the right-leaning news sources comes from “Tucker Carlson Tonight” on Fox.⁹² In it, Carlson interviews Kristi Noem (Republican Congresswoman from South Dakota). Carlson presents Noem with challenges over the reliability of economic growth projections as they relate to corporate tax cuts.⁹³ Noem responds by shifting the frame of reference to the cuts in tax brackets for individuals and couples. She maintains that as economic stimulus, the TCJA yields immediate relief by way of cuts to the individual brackets and impending relief resulting from the recovery of lost tax revenue from corporate profit-transfer. Similarly, in a separate segment on Fox, David Perdue (Republican Senator from Georgia) asserts that the TCJA will make American companies and workers globally competitive again.⁹⁴ Both members of Congress also address the rhetoric over transparency. That is, the notion that the TCJA was passed haphazardly without much input from the Democrats as there was insufficient

⁹² Carlson is a proponent of the populist-right of the political spectrum.

⁹³ “Tucker Carlson Tonight,” *Fox News*, December 19, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxIpsK4LRYg>.

⁹⁴ “Fox News @ Night,” *Fox News*, December 1, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihZ1L1Y9yTA&pbjreload=10>.

time to review the final bill. They maintain that there were over 70 hearings and meetings held to carefully consider the plan's provisions. This made the process quite open to input from the Democrats and diminishes their claims that the process lacked transparency. According to Noem and Perdue, the accusations over transparency are rhetorical devices used to cast aspersions on the plan and the Republican party. Thus, they amount to insubstantial claims for the sake of diminishing the legitimacy of the TCJA.

The next segment is from Fox Business Network that consists of a panel of analysts. It emphasizes the historical significance of the TCJA as an achievement for distributive justice. They address the immediacy of benefits from the trickle-down effect. Here, the viewer witnesses another change in the frame of reference. According to one panelist, we should start to see the benefits almost immediately due to the restriction of the provision for State and Local Taxes (SALT). Since tax payers are no longer able to yield as many deductions from this provision, it will enforce fiscal responsibility in liberal states.⁹⁵ Further, provisions such as the Child Tax Credit indicate the bipartisan collaboration in the bill as many conservatives would prefer not to include credits for government-incentivized behaviors. This also refutes the claims over lacking transparency and openness. Most recently, another segment from Fox interviewed Kevin Brady (Republican Congressman from Texas) to address the impermanence of the changes to individual tax brackets. In it, he refrains from divulging much information on specific provisions but boasts of a second phase to the tax cuts.⁹⁶ Brady also emphasizes the trickle-down benefits, particularly for liberal states such as New York, New Jersey,

⁹⁵ "Fox Business," *Fox Business Network*, December 1, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rG1AWy96knc>.

⁹⁶ "Fox Business," *Fox Business Network*, March 14, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJuhB51IKw>.

and California that will experience the most growth in jobs and wages. Moreover, he instructs the citizens of such states to demand changes in their local tax policies to offset the burden imposed by the change in the SALT provision. The second phase of the tax cuts boasts of increased stability resulting from permanent tax cuts for individuals as President Trump seeks to expand the economy.

These segments contain some interesting rhetorical devices as well. For example, an analyst from the Fox Business segment describes the Child Tax Credit as a credit for government-incentivized behavior, yet among these four segments none mention the shift of the tax burden to alimony payors as an incentive for marriage and divorce. It follows that such provisions are necessary to account for lost tax revenue, yet it appears to serve as an incentive for married couples. Further, these segments demonstrate that the emphasis by right-leaning news sources is on the recovery of tax revenue from bringing corporate profits, jobs, and wages back to the U.S. economy. Interestingly, when analysts are questioned over the immediacy of such benefits, they shift the frame of reference to tax cuts for the individual tax payer, yet these changes expire at the end of 2025 to keep the deficit-increase under \$1.5 trillion. The content of these news segments is expected as it adheres to partisan views on redistribution and economic stimulus. Yet, it remains to be seen how such reports impact public perception.

Politics v. Perception: The Public's Views

In 2016, a Gallup poll recorded the highest rate of discontent with tax rates since the 2001 tax cut. A majority (57%) of U.S. citizens agreed that they pay too much in federal income taxes; 47% said that the amount they pay in taxes is unfair.⁹⁷ Interestingly,

⁹⁷ "Most Americans in 15 Years Say Their Tax Bill Is Too High," Gallup, April 6-10, 2016, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/190778/americans-years-say-tax-bill-high.aspx>, accessed April 14, 2018.

eight months later another Gallup poll found that a majority of the U.S. believes that the Trump administration should enact a major spending program on infrastructure (69%) and cut taxes for all Americans (54%).⁹⁸ These figures convey the popular nature of reducing the tax rate for individuals. Thus, the mixed reports on popular perception for the TCJA are perplexing—they may indicate dissatisfaction with other major provisions in the plan or a biased sample. This paradox highlights the fundamental tension in Trump’s populism: politics versus perception. A review of public opinion polls reveals that, at this juncture in history, the public’s views greatly correlate with partisanship. This provides important context for the scope of this chapter. Such a revelation is fastened to the impact of the news media’s reports on public perception of the TCJA.

In December 2017, prior to the new tax bill becoming law, Gallup conducted a poll assessing U.S. adults’ reactions to the proposed changes for the federal tax code. A majority of independents (56%) and Democrats (87%) opposed the proposed changes, while a minority of Republicans (16%) opposed it. Conversely, a majority of Republicans (70%) expressed approval but only a minority of independents (25%) and Democrats (7%) expressed approval. Overall, 29% of adults approved, while 56% disapproved.⁹⁹ These figures closely follow partisan lines. That is, it follows that since the TCJA represents a major overhaul by the Republican administration, Republicans support it and Democrats oppose it for the most part. Similar trends pervade the statistical narrative as the bill was signed in to law and in the subsequent months. In March 2018, Gallup

⁹⁸ “Infrastructure Spending Deemed Most Important Trump Promise,” Gallup, January 9, 2017, http://news.gallup.com/poll/202691/infrastructure-spending-deemed-important-trump-promise.aspx?g_source=link_news9&g_campaign=item_224432&g_medium=copy, accessed April 14, 2018.

⁹⁹ Lydia Saad, “Independents, Democrats Not on Board With GOP Tax Plan,” Gallup, December 5, 2017, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/223238/independents-democrats-not-board-gop-tax-plan.aspx>, accessed April 7, 2018.

conducted another poll that assessed the TCJA's popularity among U.S. adults. In the three months since the December poll, plan approval increased to 39% for U.S. adults. Approval still closely follows party lines: 80% for Republicans and 11% for Democrats (significant increases since December). Further, 32% of adults have reported an increase in take-home pay and 20% reported that the changes have had a positive impact on their finances.¹⁰⁰ Although support for the plan is increasing gradually, most U.S. adults still do not approve of the plan. When one considers the disparity between Democratic and Republican support for the bill, the refusal to acknowledge positive impacts of the TCJA by its Democratic opponents.¹⁰¹ Yet, if most U.S. adults initially reported that President Trump should cut taxes, why is there not majority support among adults for the TCJA? Are samples for each of these studies biased and incongruous when taken as an aggregation of studies? The entrenchment along party lines is revelatory as it manifests in the public's views of government.

In the last few days of 2017, Gallup published a series of articles that detail studies pertaining to the American public's perception of government. They reveal that government has been the most frequently cited problem facing the nation from 2014 to 2017. Moreover, most Americans that discuss government as the top problem emphasize the process of government and political personalities—namely fighting and bickering

¹⁰⁰ Jeffrey M. Jones, "Support for Tax Overhaul Rising, but Law Remains Unpopular," Gallup, March 7, 2018, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/228653/support-tax-overhaul-rising-law-remains-unpopular.aspx>, accessed April 7, 2018.

¹⁰¹ The figures for approval/disapproval of the Affordable Care Act (ACA)—a Democratic initiative—follow similar trends to the TCJA, inversely. That is, in 2012 most adults (80%) that reported approval for the ACA were Democrats; whereas, those that reported the least approval (7%) were Republicans. In 2017, these figures continued to strictly follow party lines (85% and 11% respectively). See Megan Brenan, "Affordable Care Act Approval Slips After Record Highs," Gallup, November 27, 2017, http://news.gallup.com/poll/222734/affordable-care-act-approval-slips-record-highs.aspx?g_source=link_news9&g_campaign=item_224432&g_medium=copy, accessed April 7, 2018.

across the aisle—as opposed to concerns about government size, policies, and power.¹⁰² Currently, only 27% of Americans are satisfied with the state of the Union.¹⁰³ This frustration with government has revealed itself through the several shifts in party control of government in the past century. According to Margaret Canovan, populism is born of the struggle to redeem democracy’s institutional mechanisms and restore the legitimacy of its mechanisms for popular sovereignty.¹⁰⁴ The increasing entrenchment along party lines exacerbates the conditions that undergird Canovan’s hypothesis. That is, as the U.S. government sets out to reform its institutions, policy agendas pertaining to different sides of the aisle rely less on compromise and more on positional bargaining. This makes bipartisan solutions on key issues increasingly rare and accelerates the life cycle of each party in power. In the past 15 years alone, the U.S. has seen a one-party Republican government from 2002-2006, a divided government in 2007-2008, a one-party Democratic government in 2009-2010, a divided government in 2011-2016, and a one-party Republican government today.¹⁰⁵ Thus, it follows that the TCJA’s approval will primarily consist of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents, which does not suffice to reflect a majority approval of the plan for U.S. adults overall. This contributes

¹⁰² Jeffrey M. Jones, Frank Newport, and Lydia Saad, “How Americans Perceive Government in 2017,” Gallup, November 1, 2017, http://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/221171/americans-perceive-government-2017.aspx?g_source=link_NEWSV9&g_medium=SIDEBOTTOM&g_campaign=item_202691&g_content=How%2520Americans%2520Perceive%2520Government%2520in%25202017, accessed April 7, 2018.

¹⁰³ Andrew Dugan , and Frank Newport, “The American Public in 2017: What We Learned,” Gallup, December 28, 2017. <http://news.gallup.com/poll/224717/american-public-2017-learned.aspx>, accessed April 7, 2018.

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter 1.

¹⁰⁵ Jeffrey M. Jones, Frank Newport, and Lydia Saad, “How Americans Perceive Government in 2017,” Gallup, November 1, 2017, http://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/221171/americans-perceive-government-2017.aspx?g_source=link_NEWSV9&g_medium=SIDEBOTTOM&g_campaign=item_202691&g_content=How%2520Americans%2520Perceive%2520Government%2520in%25202017, accessed April 7, 2018.

to an environment ripe for unrelenting populism—one that may make the liberal democratic order obsolete.

Conclusion

This analysis of the TCJA strikes at the heart of the populist narrative: redistribution and representation. That is, the competing interests fastened to the populist sentiment of a coalition are tied to government responses to material concerns and representation of the constituency's political identity. As the most recent leader to claim the populist mantle in the U.S., President Trump's responses to the material concerns of such groups require analysis. However, as this is unfolding in real-time, it is necessary to emphasize the politics of the TCJA (as reported by the news media) and its perception (as reported by opinion polls on the public's views). The actual representative and redistributive benefits can be estimated, but not measured, so this analysis hinges on politics and perception. The analysis of the news media's reports on the plan, as well as the public opinion polls cited in this chapter, reveal that politics and perception correlate highly with partisanship.

In the news segments from both ends of the political spectrum, the pundits primarily relied on rhetoric and shifting frames of reference to weave a narrative favorable to their political allegiance. Pundits from the left focused on the proportional benefits from the TCJA for the wealthiest in society that allegedly trickles down to the individual tax payer. Pundits from the right focused on the incentives created for the wealthy to keep their money in the U.S. economy to create more jobs and tax revenue. Pundits from both sides acknowledged the immediate tax cuts for individuals. Those from the left present the individual cuts as a sleight of hand to placate individuals as the

current administration panders to its campaign donors. Whereas, those from the right present the individual cuts as redistributive justice. Similarly, the public's views have aligned themselves along partisan lines. Just as with the ACA, in which Democrats expressed majority approval and Republicans expressed majority disapproval, public views on the TCJA reflect majority approval by Republicans and majority disapproval by Democrats. This is effectively a zero-sum game for partisan politics. As each party fails to please constituents from across the aisle, populist sentiments continue to build as a response to hard policy-shifts from left to right.

Conclusion

In 1892, as the economy shifted from agriculture to manufacturing, many agrarians began to lose market share, income, and jobs. As a result, they mobilized as a coalition that demanded government represent them; the U.S. Populist Party was formed. It was a response to the increasing political influence of the wealthiest 1%—monied interests from railroads, banks, manufacturing, and other industries; thus, the 1892 Populists coalesced to demand a response from government. This culminated in FDR's election and redistributive agenda (the New Deal). The New Deal affirmed the political identity of new groups that mobilized as American society modernized. In 2008, as the economy shifted from manufacturing to a service-oriented economy, groups began to mobilize against the influence of monied interests once again—banks and corporations—in government. Government responses have left much to be desired: a massive bailout of banks in response to the greatest financial downturn since the Great Depression, an Affordable Care Act (ACA) that functioned as a tax, and most recently the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. All throughout, some groups antagonize the wealthy elite for undue influence through campaign contributions and the like. Others antagonize the intellectual elite for undue influence through their role as government planners and experts. Populism is born as the groups' response to the belief that their rendition of the elite has illegitimately seized the reins of popular sovereignty. These perspectives are also born of material concerns—the loss of jobs to robotics and offshoring—and political identity—government's capacity and willingness to represent the social and cultural preferences of these groups. Hence, the populist identity forms as a reaction to concerns over redistribution and representation.

As a concept attached to various facets of a sociopolitical movement, *populism* consists of four dominant traits: it results from a void created by the struggle for legitimate representation, an antagonistic narrative, an ideologically thin-center, and a charismatic leader. Such are the insights contained in the first chapter. These traits yield a framework by which to characterize the populist movement in its current iteration in the United States. The first trait refers to the void created by the struggle for legitimate representation of the constituency in government institutions. Margaret Canovan's hypothesis on the two faces of democracy—one *redemptive* and the other *pragmatic*—supports the prevalence of this trait. More specifically, the crisis of representation is emphasized by Murray's insights in chapter two as they relate to the fragmentation of the middle class—of which, only those that have assimilated with the more affluent strata of society are being represented in government. Further, Canovan's insight overlaps with Murray's in the former's assertion that from *the people's* perspective, *the elite* are imposing their moral views and cultural particularities on *the people*. In this endeavor, *the elite* (as opinion leaders in the academy and media) are increasingly represented in the government at the expense of *the people*. This shifts the discussion to the second trait, the antagonistic narrative.

The antagonistic narrative is a process of role ascription for the two main actors in the script: *the people* and *the elite*. It is important to note that *the elite* refers to the dominant sociopolitical group that is overrepresented in government; however, in this narrative they ally with other groups to help proliferate their views (journalists, immigrants, and the courts)—the aggregate of these groups and *the elite* is known as *the other*. *The people's* animus is born initially of material concerns. Such concerns are

represented by Fukuyama's insights in chapter two; they include, the loss of jobs to offshoring and robotics as the U.S. economy increasingly shifts from manufacturing to a service-oriented economy. Further, these concerns are exacerbated by the increasing gap in income inequality. In the view of *the people* (the sociopolitical group that is underrepresented in government), government responses in the wake of these material conditions have increasingly favored *the elite*. Such government responses include: a massive bailout of banks in response to the greatest financial downturn since the Great Depression, an Affordable Care Act (ACA) that functioned as a tax, and most recently the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. At this juncture, the populist narrative begins to collide with ideologically partisan views on the role of government in society.

Such is the point of divergence for the antagonistic narrative: some groups antagonize the wealthy elite for undue influence through campaign contributions and the like; others antagonize the intellectual elite for undue influence through their role as government planners and experts.¹⁰⁶ This shifts the discussion to *populism's* third trait: an ideologically thin-center. The thin-center hypothesis is one of Mudde's insights. In it, Mudde asserts that populism's thin-center will attach itself to a thicker ideology in opposition to the dominant group's views. For example, populism is currently attached to a conservative ideology in U.S. political discourse. It is not a traditionally conservative agenda, but it does contravene the left-leaning tendencies of government since 2008 (as exemplified by the TCJA and ACA, respectively). Thus, the thin-center is primarily normative but lacks the more programmatic integrity found in thicker ideologies such as

¹⁰⁶ This opens another avenue for research related to populism: a historical review of policy changes since 2008; why did populism attach itself to the right instead of the left? This should include a review of Bernie Sander's appeal to *populism* and the reasons for his electoral loss in 2016.

conservatism or liberalism. Through the logic of opposition, however, modern populism in the U.S. attached itself to conservatism to seek recompense for its grievances and breach the proliferation of *the elite's* preferences in government.

Furthermore, the more abstract normative agenda of populism's thin-center also manifests in cultural particularities. Ostiguy and Roberts's insights on the political high and low in chapter two support this feature. Ostiguy and Roberts assert that the high-low axis represents behavioral tendencies, communicative styles, and preferred leadership styles. Although *the people's* disposition is born initially of material concerns, their perception of government incentives for social norms gains greater importance. In effect, cultural particularities may be of lower importance than material conditions, but sociopolitical groups will not tolerate a government that fails to represent them on both fronts. Ostiguy and Roberts' insight is necessary to understand this feature of identity in U.S. political discourse.¹⁰⁷ As such, preferences on communicative styles and behavioral tendencies are imposed on leaders spewing the populist mantra. This shifts the discussion to populism's fourth trait, the charismatic leader.

Potential leaders must embody an opposition of the cultural (behavioral and communicative) particularities and leadership preferences of the dominant sociopolitical group. According to Ostiguy and Roberts, the opposition manifests in particularities like coarse plain-speak, unrelenting bravado, and insistence on subverting institutions to get things done. These leadership traits are another example of the logic of opposition.

Weyland's insights in the first chapter also rely on the logic of opposition. He asserts that leaders mobilize a coalition in opposition to the current regime's political and cultural

¹⁰⁷ This opens an avenue for further research as it relates to populism in the U.S.: the shift in political discourse from class-based identity to racial- and gender-based identity.

commitments (a function of *the elite's* preferences in the antagonistic narrative). Weyland maintains that the leader relies on appeals to group identity to build allegiance with marginalized sociopolitical groups. Such appeals are made by petitioning a collective group identity or relying on the portrait of a model citizen that should serve as the standard for collective identity. This is evident in the nativism represented by Ostiguy and Robert's model. That is, nativism consists of a set of prescribed imperatives depending on the groups' views of what it means to be *truly from here*—which depends on their affiliation with conservative or liberal portions of the political spectrum.

The third chapter serves as an exposé of the preceding discussion: a government response to the material concerns of the constituency, the politics and perception of the response (in the news media and public opinion polls) based on partisan affiliations (group identity), and its effect of the growing rift in the struggle over legitimate representation. The snapshot of the major provisions in the TCJA demonstrate that most individual tax-payers will receive some direct material relief. The claims regarding recovering jobs lost to off-shoring remains to be seen. More importantly, the third chapter demonstrates shifting frames of reference in the reporting on the TCJA depending on partisan affiliation. Right-leaning news outlets (Fox News and Fox Business Network) emphasize the tax relief as distributive justice and proper government incentives for recovering lost tax revenue and jobs. Left-leaning news outlets (PBS and CNN) emphasize distributional projections by the Congressional Budget Office that suggest disingenuous intentions by the Republican party. This is especially intriguing when one considers that a 2016 Gallup poll reveals that next to investing in infrastructure, most Americans believe that decreasing federal income taxes should be a top priority.

More importantly, the third chapter demonstrates the prevalence of Canovan's hypothesis over democracy's two-faces. That is, as the struggle between Republicans and Democrats over legitimate representation of the constituency is increasingly polarized a rift ensues in which sociopolitical groups resort to *populism*. The third chapter relies on Gallup polls that demonstrate Americans' opinion on the top problem for the United States: government. In explaining the problem government poses, Americans cite constant bickering across the aisle and unrelenting positional bargaining in drafting policy solutions. The TCJA, as with the ACA, are prominent examples of such problems' effects. Inasmuch as the TCJA was born of a Republican government, its support in public opinion is overwhelmingly Republican; similarly, as the ACA was born of a Democratic government, its support in public opinion is overwhelmingly Democratic. Ironically, the very problem for the United States cited by most Americans (government) is exacerbated by a government response born of an administration with overwhelming support by conservative populism in the constituency.

It is the position of this paper that populism exists solely as a trait of the constituency. Leaders that claim to be, or that have been dubbed, populists have simply identified a feature of the constituency that is ripe for mobilization.¹⁰⁸ This is not a cynical claim asserting the disingenuous nature of all politicians. It is instead an observation based on the substance of the preceding discussion. Further, unlike the late 19th century populism in the U.S. that culminated in the New Deal, this iteration is not satisfied with government responses since the 2008 financial downturn. U.S. citizens

¹⁰⁸ This opens yet another avenue for further research: the populism leaders make. That is, can leaders themselves be populist? What facets of organizational identity, as opposed to that of an outsider, in leaders are sufficient for populist movements?

have instead expressed major discontent with their government—citing it as the largest problem. Thus, in their desperation modern populists have turned to a man that they do not fully understand, one that espouses their group identity and political preferences, to subvert the established order. Recent political developments have caused some scholars and journalists to speculate over the viability of democracy in the U.S. That is, whether the liberal-democratic order can survive or has become obsolete. Populism can be a cathartic experience for groups that resort to its accoutrement, but without adequate responses from government (in policy and political norms) populism's ubiquity and growing intensity has destructive potential. Unfortunately, it may destroy more than the mechanisms it holds responsible. One thing is for sure, U.S. democracy will never be the same.

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