# UNA PERSPECTIVA TRANSATLÁNTICA SOBRE POPULISMO/S: ¿QUÉ ESTÁ PASANDO?

## A TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE ON POPULISM(S): WHAT'S GOING ON?

**Ariane Chebel d'Appollonia**
Rutgers University (SPAA, DGA)
Sciences Po Paris (CEVIPOF)
arianecd@rutgers.edu

**Resumen:** Este artículo trata sobre las diferencias y coincidencias entre los populismos en Europa y el Trumpismo. Evalúa, asimismo, tres elementos que son percibidos generalmente como explicación de acontecimientos recientes, como el Brexit y la elección de Donald Trump: un desencanto con la democracia, la desigualdad económica y una reacción cultural. Mientras el trumpismo incluye peculiaridades típicamente americanas, refleja una profunda crisis social que afecta a todas las democracias occidentales. Esta crisis está alimentada por una cultura del miedo, un síndrome revanchista y una creciente banalización de la violencia.

**Abstract:** This paper addresses the similarities and differences between forms of populism in Europe and Trumpism. It evaluates three factors that are commonly perceived as explaining recent events, such as Brexit and the election of election of Donald Trump: a democratic disenchantment; economic inequality; and a cultural backlash. While Trumpism includes typically American peculiarities, it reflects a deep societal crisis that affects all Western democracies. This crisis is fueled by a culture of fear, a revanchist syndrome, and an increasing banality of violence.

What's going on? This is definitely the first and foremost question raised by either supporters of, or opponents to, the changes Western democracies now face. For advocates of Brexit or Trump supporters, we are entering into a new era. It is one characterized by the collapse of a corrupted establishment; the decline of mainstream parties disconnected from popular concerns; and increasing push towards equity for the "left-behinds" of neoliberal globalization. They believe that some restitution is

part of the overdue recognition of their legitimate grievances as the insecure strata of society.

Opponents frame the critical issues in a differing way. For them it is to understand "how did we get into this mess?"[1] . That "mess" includes the improved electoral fortune of populist leaders; the development of savage partisan divisions; common and increasingly aggressive affronts to minimal decency; the growth of ethno-religious prejudice; and the normalization of racial conservatism.

For European commentators, there were "echoes of Trumpism in the nationalist parties of Britain, Denmark, the Netherlands, Greece as well as France." Common to all of them is "a dissatisfaction with the status quo, the sense that middle-class and working class have been neglected by the existing political establishment, a feeling that politicians aren't honest with voters"[2]. Trump himself was often compared to authoritarian leaders (such as Putin and Erdogan), and populist activists like Geert Wilder in the Netherlands, Marine Le Pen in France, and Frauke Petry in Germany. "Now that Trump is coming," Brian O'Connor wrote in *Time*, "we must look at this election in the broader context of Western populism – a trend that shows no sign in true direction but also shows no signs of weakening anytime soon"[3]. Marine Le Pen, the self-proclaimed "Madame Frexit", tweeted her congratulations to President Trump who characterized himself "Mr Brexit plus, plus" and tweeted that she was the "strongest candidate" in the run up to the French presidential election. Nigel Farage, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) leader who strongly supported the exit from the EU, celebrated Trump's victory as a "win double". President Trump, reciprocally, made Farage "a close but unofficial adviser" in the immediate aftermath of his inauguration.

One American observer noted that both the Brexit campaign and the Trump campaign were "boiled with populist anger, fear-mongering by politicians, hostility towards distant political elites and resurgent nationalism"[4]. In *The Washington Post*, Chris Cillizza emphasized the "remarkable parallels between the Brexit vote and the rise of Donald Trump"[5]. He listed major similarities between the two campaigns, such as the vehemence of anti-immigrant feelings, distrust for institutions, and a disdain for the presiding political elites. *USA Today* reported that Trump himself stressed a "big parallel… People want their country back. Britons took their country back, just like we will take America back"[6].

1. McAdam, D. and Kloos, K. (2014) *Deeply Divided. Racial Politics and Social Movements in Postwar America,* Oxford, N.Y., Oxford University Press, p. 3.

2. Ketty, K. (2016) "Europe Hates Trump. Does it Matter?", *BBC*, March 4. Available at http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35702584. Access May 8, 2017.

3. O'Connor, B. (2016) "President Trump and Brexit Are Only the Start", *Time*, November 11. Available at http://time.com/4566638/trump-brexit-france-germany/. Access May 8, 2017.

4. Collinson, S. (2016) "Trump on Brexit: America Is Next", *CNN*, June 25. Available at http://www.cnn.com/2016/06/24/politics/us-election-brexit-donald-trump-hillary-clinton/. Access May 8, 2017.

5. Cillizza, C. (2016) "The Remarkable Parallels Between the Brexit Vote and the Rise of Donald Trump", *The Washington Post*, June 24. Available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/06/24/the-remarkable-parallels-between-the-brexit-vote-and-the-rise-of-donald-trump/?utm_term=.69f4949116f4. Access May 8, 2017.

6. Onyango-Omara, J. (2016) "Parallels Run Strong With Shocking Trump U.S. victory

## 1. What's supposedly going on?

From a macro-perspective, three interrelated series of factors are key. The first focuses on political factors and relates to a *democratic disenchantment*, of which there are several elements. A substantial body of research has documented the strong decline in institutional trust, a decrease in political participation, the rejection of mainstream political establishment, and the toxic impact of ideological polarization[7]. David Van Reybrouck, a Belgium intellectual, suggested that the loss of confidence in politicians was a manifestation of the "Democratic Fatigue Syndrome"[8].

Surveys substantiate this perspective. The share of the vote for populist, authoritarian parliamentary parties in Europe has increased by an average of 50 percent over the past two decades. In contrast, the number of people who consider it "essential" to live in a democracy has sharply declined, today constituting 32 per cent of those born after 1980 according to the

World Values Survey[9]. In its 2017 report, fittingly entitled "Trust In Crisis," the Edelman Trust Barometer found that only 41 percent of respondents in 28 countries said they trusted their government[10]. And according to a 2014 Eurobarometer survey, 72 percent of Europeans distrusted their government, while 82 percent distrusted their national political parties[11]. This trend extends to the United States where faith in institutions has reached historic lows. According to a Gallup opinion poll survey, only 32 percent of respondents expressed confidence in 14 major U.S. institutions in 2016 – down from 38 percent in 2007. The data on confidence in Congress is even more stunning: declining from 19 percent to nine percent during the same period[12]. By 2017, more than 20 percent of U.S. adults cited dissatisfaction with the government and political leadership as *the* most important problem facing the country[13].

The second set of factors relate to *economic inequality*. This perspective

and Brexit", *USA Today*, November 9. Available at https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2016/11/09/donald-trump-president-brexit-united-kingdom/93540450/. Access May 8, 2017. See also Zakaria, F. (1997) "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December. Available at https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1997-11-01/rise-illiberal-democracy. Access May 8, 2017.

7. Stoker, G. (2016) "Explaining Political Disenchantment: Finding Pathways to Democratic Renewal", *The Political Quarterly* 77 (2): 184-194; Parker, C. and Barreto, M. (2013) *Change They Can't Believe in: The Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in Contemporary America,* Princeton, N.J, Princeton University Press.

8. Van Reybrouk, D. (2016) *Against Election: The Case for Democracy*, London, Random House.

9. Foa, R. S. and Mounk, Y. (2016) "The Democratic Disconnect", *Journal of Democracy*, 27 (3), pp. 6-18.

10. Available at http://www.edelman.com/executive-summary/. Access May 9, 2017.

11. Standard Eurobarometer (2014), *Public Opinion in the European Union,* 81, Spring. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/eb/eb81/eb81_publ_en.pdf. Access May 9, 2017.

12. Available at http://www.gallup.com/poll/192581/americans-confidence-institutions-stays-low.aspx. Access May 9, 2017.

13. Swift, A. (2017) "Americans Name Dissatisfaction With Government as Top Problem", *Gallup*, April 5. Available at http://www.gallup.com/poll/208526/adults-name-government-dissatisfaction-important-problem.aspx?g_source=Politics&g_medium=newsfeed&g_campaign=tiles. Access May 9, 2017.

emphasizes the consequences of globalization on post-industrial economies. They include four elements: the decline of manufacturing industry, the erosion of organized labor, an increasing competition over scarce social resources (such as welfare benefits and educational opportunities), and the dramatic socio-economic inequalities enhanced by neoliberal austerity policies[14]. These trends collectively fuel resentment among the so-called "losers of globalization." They become susceptible to exploitative anti-establishment, nativist, and xenophobic scare-mongering by populists who blame 'Them' for stripping prosperity, job opportunities, and public services from 'Us'[15]. This narrative has taken two forms in the United States. On the Left, the economic inequality argument has been foundational to the anti-Wall Street narrative embedded in the campaign of the democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders. On the Right, in its nativist formulation, it has driven Trump's supporters who praise the restoration of a past golden age through restrictions to NAFTA, the rejection of the Paris Climate Agreement, American withdrawal from the proposed Trans Pacific Partnership, and the avid endorsement of anti-migrant measures. In Europe, concerns about the "dark sides" of globalization have catalyzed support for Eurosceptic parties (such as UKIP in Great Britain, the Freedom Party in Austria and Golden Dawn in Greece) and left-wing populist groups (such as PODEMOS in Spain, and Syriza in Greece). Charles Hankla, professor at Georgia University State, argued that the Brexit vote and Trump's election reflected a global rejection of liberal ideals. These two events, he wrote, indicated that "a significant number of Britons and Americans, especially among the native-born working class, have negative feelings about immigration, free markets and social change more generally"[16].

The third approach to explaining the crisis of liberal democracies focuses on a *cultural backlash*. Ronald Ingelhart and Pippa Norris maintain that this perspective builds on the "silent revolution" theory "which holds that the shift toward post-materialist values, such as cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism" triggers a "counter-revolutionary retro backlash, especially among the older generation, white men, and less educated sectors, who sense decline and actively reject the rising tide of progressive values"[17]. Active participants in this cultural backlash include the Tea Party Movement in the United States, as well as other political and religious groups combating key components of "identity liberalism" – such as gender and racial equality, and equal rights for the LGBT community. Populist movements in Europe exploit a sense of cultural insecurity by raising the specter of the Islamization of the continent, denouncing the decline of national identity, and rejecting progressive

14. Piketty, T. (2014) *Capital*, Cambridge, MA, Bellnap Press; Hacker, J. (2006) *The Great Risk Shift: The New Economic Insecurity and the Decline of the American Dream,* NY, Oxford University Press.

15. Inglehart, R. and Norris, P. (2016) "Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash", *Faculty Research Working Paper*, Harvard Kennedy School.

16. Hankla, C. (2016) "Intolerance on the March: Do Brexit and Trump Point to Global Rejection of Liberal Ideals?", *The Conversation*, June 28. Available at https://theconversation.com/intolerance-on-the-march-do-brexit-and-trump-point-to-global-rejection-of-liberal-ideals-61632. Access May 8, 2017.

17. *Ibid*, p. 3.

changes (such as the legalization of same-sex marriage).

## 2. Is Trumpism exceptional?

Notable comparable trends on both sides of the Atlantic inevitably leads to the suggestion that they are caused by similar factors – whether they are political, economic cultural or a combination of two or more. But does it follow that the same effects are produced by the same causes?

In the wake of Brexit and the rise of Trump, many observers expressed concerns about a populist spillover effect in Europe from these two events. Yet, not all populist European leaders nor their parties benefitted from a "Trump effect." Far-right candidate Geert Wilders' campaign fell short of expectations in the Dutch elections in March 2017. His Freedom Party (PVV) lost by a significant margin, being overtaken by the ruling center-right Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD). In France, Marine Le Pen lost the second round of the presidential election in May 2017 despite her intense anti-immigrant campaign, longstanding double-digit unemployment, and a series of terrorist attacks (which killed more than 230 people in 2015-16). Furthermore, the GERB, a pro-European center-right party won the election in Bulgaria over anti-EU/anti-migrant candidates while UKIP's share of the vote dramatically declined at both the local and national levels in Britain. During the general election if June 2017, the Conservative Party did not benefit from a positive "Brexit effect"; instead, the Conservatives won by a very small margin and lost 13 seats.

These examples lend credence to the claim that Trumpism may indeed be "exceptional." If so, a problem remains in defining the most relevant components of this exceptionalism.

Scholars and political analysts have focused on four possible factors.

The first –and most individualized– relates to *peculiarities of the current leadership.* American populist nativism is as old as the United States itself – from Benjamin Franklin complaining about the "Palatine Boors" who were trying to Germanize Pennsylvania to the Know Nothing movement and the Order of the Star-Spangled Banner whose motto in the mid-19th century was "America for Americans"[18]. Indeed, key components of "Trumpism" have been exploited by previous political leaders who did not reach the Oval Office over the last five decades – such as Pat Buchanan and George Wallace. Other presidential contenders had a business background but also failed – such as William Randolph Hearst, Henry Ford, and Ross Perot.

Trump, by contrast, successfully combines different US traditions: anti-intellectualism, nativist populism, and racial conservatism, combined with a long-standing distrust of government and grassroots contempt for the political correctness of the liberal establishment. He can thus be characterized as a "non-identified political" Janus figure who combines an insurgent mystic appeal in his fight against the corrupt establishment with the iconic American myth of the "self-made billionaire." As Peter Beinart wrote in *The Atlantic*, Trump wants to "make America exceptional again" by promoting his own "exceptionalist story" – a narrative emphasizing on US sovereignty, nationhood, and the protection of US cultural values"[19].

18. Chebel d'Appollonia, A. (2012) *Frontiers of Fear: Immigration and Insecurity in the United States and Europe,* Ithaca, Cornell University Press.

19. Beinart, P. (2017) "How Trump Wants to Make America Exceptional Again", *The Atlantic*, February. Available at https://www.theatlantic.

A second approach to explaining Trump exceptionalism relates to the idiosyncrasies *of party strategies* and the US electoral system. Trump's electoral victory may have surprised scholars and political pundits. But it can be understood as the culmination of a long-term, partisan evolution. The GOP began its strategic rightward shift under Nixon's 'Southern strategy" in order to capture George Wallace's electoral support. It was later reinforced by Ronald Reagan who also energized racial conservatives, and firmly embedded the Christian right in the GOP with a focus on abortion, cultural wars and the use of drugs as electoral issues. Conversely, the Democratic Party meanwhile rebranded its platform under pressure from the civil rights movement of the 1960s, and the New Left of the 1970s. "Playing to the base" was seen as strategically more important, according to Doug McAdam and Karina Kloos, than courting the "median voter" on both sides[20]. This trend towards partisan polarization increased during the Clinton administration, and peaked during the Obama administration. The Tea Party movement accelerated the GOP's rightward shift. Its major agenda consisted of ousting Obama, repealing the Affordable Care Act, reducing taxes, downsizing the federal government, and vehemently opposing progressive regulations[21]. Conversely, Democrats moved leftward, increasingly invoking the strategy and rhetoric of diversity by appealing to minorities of all stripes to vote for them.

Cumulatively, the 2016 presidential campaign resembled a wrestling match organized by peculiar electoral rules (such as the super-PACs, and the electoral college) in a contest characterized by intense political animosity. About 58 percent of Republicans had a very unfavorable impression of the Democratic Party in 2016, up from just 32 percent in 2008 and 46 percent in 2014. Highly negative views of the GOP among Democrats have similarly escalated: from 37 percent in 2008 to 43 percent in 2014 and 55 percent in 2016[22]. Such an intense political polarization helped Trump to take control of the GOP, and to secure the support of his voters. Although only 38 percent of Americans had a favorable opinion of Trump in November 2017, 82 percent of Republicans still supported him[23].

A third recent approach has focused on public opinion, notably the grievances of some white Americans - and their hostility to minority groups. Trump's rhetoric during the presidential campaign combined nativist arguments (such the priority given to native workers over immigrants for employment and social benefits) and xenophobic fear tactics – conflating the notions of "terrorist" (against Muslims) and "criminal" (against Hispanics). Trump voters strongly subscribed to this rhetoric. A public opinion poll conducted by the Pew Research Center in November 2016 found that 79 percent of Trump voters believed that illegal

com/politics/archive/2017/02/how-trump-wants-to-make-america-exceptional-again/515406/. Access May 12, 2017.

20. McAdam, D. and Kloos, K. (2014) *Deeply Divided. Racial Politics and Social Movements in Postwar America*, *op. cit*, p. 9.

21. Skocpol, T. and Williamson, V. (2012) *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism,* New York, Oxford University Press.

22. Pew Research Center (2016) "Partisanship and Political animosity in 2016", *US Politics & Policy*. Available at http://www.people-press.org/2016/06/22/partisanship-and-political-animosity-in-2016/. Access May 23, 2017.

23. Gallup Opinion Poll Survey. Available at http://news.gallup.com/poll/203198/presidential-approval-ratings-donald-trump.aspx. Access November 14, 2014.

immigration was a "very big" problem in the country while only 20 percent of Clinton voters expressed such a belief. Since then, studies measuring the respective impact of intolerant attitudes towards immigrants and economic insecurity have illustrated that xenophobia –combined with conservative values– was the main predictor of those who for Trump. Trump performed best among Republicans who score highest in white ethnocentrism, anti-immigrant attitudes, racial resentment, fear of Muslims, and ethno-racial intolerance.

The fourth approach focuses on America's unique and core relationship to racism. The disparity in the views of Clinton and Trump supporters about the prevalence of racism and its foundational role in defining American social and economic relations is remarkable. Various exit polls confirmed that white non-Hispanic voters preferred Trump over Clinton by 21 points. In that context, racism was viewed as a major problem by 53 percent of Clinton voters but by only 21 percent of Trump voters[24]. Much has been made about the fact that Trump won an overwhelming share (67 percent compared with just 28 percent who supported Clinton) among whites without a college degree. But, reinforcing the significance of race, Trump also got more support from whites *with* a college degree graduates than Clinton (49 and 45 percent respectively)[25].

Michael Tesler, in his book *Post-Racial or Most-Racial? Race and Politics in the Obama Era*, provided evidence that racial attitudes have increasingly structured public opinion about immigration, as well as perceptions of economic conditions. Notably, data from the Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (from 2008 and 2012) showed that economic anxiety was not causing racism; rather, racial resentment was driving economic anxiety[26]. And in their analysis of the American National Election Study' 2016 Pilot Study, Michael Tesler and John Sides argue that both white racial identity and beliefs that whites suffer from discrimination were powerful predictors of support for Trump[27].

In this context, it is reasonable to assume that the core support for Trump comes from white, blue-collar manufacturing (or ex-manufacturing) voters who subscribe to a politicized nativism and ethno-racial nationalism. Trump was indeed portrayed as the candidate of the poor white working-class. Among his supporters, 63 percent said that job opportunities

24. Pew Research Center (2016) *A Divided and Pessimistic Electorate,* November 10. Available at http://www.people-press.org/2016/11/10/a-divided-and-pessimistic-electorate/. Access December 12, 2016.

25. Pew Research Center (2016) *Behind Trump's Victory: Divisions by Race, Gender, Education,* November 9. Available at http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/behind-trumps-victory-divisions-by-race-gender-education/. Access November 12, 2016.

26. Tesler, M. (2016) *Post-Racial or Most-Racial? Race and Politics in the Obama Era,* Chicago, Chicago University Press. See also (2016) "Economic Anxiety isn't Driving Racial Resentment. Racial Resentment Is Driving Economic Anxiety", *The Washington Post*, August 22. Available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/08/22/economic-anxiety-isnt-driving-racial-resentment-racial-resentment-is-driving-economic-anxiety/?utm_term=.df9955bda622. Access August 25, 2016.

27. Tesler, M. and Sides, J. (2016) "How Political Science Helps Explain the Rise of Trump: The Role of White Identity and Grievances", *The Washington Post*, March 3. Available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/03/03/how-political-science-helps-explain-the-rise-of-trump-the-role-of-white-identity-and-grievances/?tid=a_inl&utm_term=.6eab9db6f24b. Access April 2, 2016.

for working-class Americans were a "very big" problem in the country. There is evidence that supporters of Trump are indeed white, more likely to work in blue-collar occupations, and less likely to have a college degree than voters who supported Clinton. Nevertheless, when compared to the general population, they have higher-than-average income, are 60 percent more likely to be self-employed, and live in communities with little manufacturing activities and high levels of racial homogeneity. Trump was therefore elected by voters having relatively high incomes –sharing nothing in common with the working class– except a strong sense of economic insecurity[28].

Trump exceptionalism admittedly relates to white ethnocentrism and racism. A survey conducted by PRRI among white working-class Trump voters, for example, showed that fears about immigrants and cultural displacement (such as the feeling of "being stranger in their own land") were among the more powerful factors motivating Trump supporters. About 68 percent of respondents said "the U.S. is in danger of losing its culture and identity;" 62 percent believed that immigrants threaten American culture; and 52 percent agreed that discrimination against whites has become a "big problem" in recent years[29].

There are, however, puzzling trends that suggest that racial prejudice is only one subcomponent of a broader phenomenon. It is worth noticing, for example, that Obama won a significant number of votes among racially prejudiced whites in 2008 and 2012. About one quarter of whites, for example, who did not even think that blacks and whites should date each other supported Obama for president[30]. In aggregate, whites preferred Trump over Clinton (58 percent to 37 percent). Trump, however, fared little better among blacks and Hispanics than Mitt Romney had in 2012. No pre-election polls suggested that Trump would get as high as the 8 percent of black voting support –mostly conservative evangelicals– he received. Clinton, in contrast, lost one million black voters. So the assumption that political polarization involves only white voters against minority voters is misleading. Data on perceptions of racism provide significant evidence of anti-black prejudice among whites, and a widespread feeling among African Americans that they are discriminated against by whites on a racial. But, interestingly, about 37 percent of Americans believe that most black Americans are more racist than whites and Hispanics. And even among

28. Silver, N. (2016) "The Mythology of Trump's Working Class' Support", *Politics*. Available at https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-mythology-of-trumps-working-class-support/.
Access May 23, 2017.

29. Cox, D. et al. (2017) "Beyond Economics: Fears of Cultural Displacement Pushed the White Working Class to Trump", *PPRI/The Atlantic*. Available at https://www.prri.org/research/white-working-class-attitudes-economy-trade-immigration-election-donald-trump/. Access May 12, 2017.

30. Tesler, M. (2016) "Obama Won Lots of Votes From Racially Prejudiced Whites (And Some of Them Supported Trump)", *The Washington Post,* December 7. Available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/12/07/obama-won-lots-of-votes-from-racially-prejudiced-whites-and-some-of-them-supported-trump/?utm_term=.f1e988212db5. Access December 8, 2016. See also Popkin, S. and Rivers, D. (2016) "The Unmaking of President McCain," *The Economist*/YouGov/Polimetrix. Available at http://www.pollster.com/blogs/Popkin%20Rivers%20Campaign%20Analysis%2011-04%20w%20graphs.pdf. Access December 9, 2016.

African Americans, 31 percent think that most blacks are racists[31].

Party affiliation actually divided within racial groups: for example, 53 percent of Hispanic Republicans believe that Trump will be a good or great president. By comparison, 58 percent of Hispanic Democrats believe that Trump will be a poor or terrible president[32]. Furthermore, the relationship between "being a member of a migrant minority" and "having a positive view of immigrants" is more complex than might be expected. Hispanics, for example, are more likely than whites or blacks to believe that immigrants are make a positive contribution to American society (61 percent, 41 percent, and 44 percent respectively). Twenty percent of Hispanics, however, have negative views of the impact of immigrants on the United States. Only 39 percent of Hispanics have a positive view of Latin American immigrants, and 48 percent believe that the U.S. government should give priority to highly educated immigrants – despite the fact that Hispanic immigrants are less educated than other groups. Among third generation Latinos, one-third (32 percent) believe that the impact of unauthorized immigration on Hispanics living in the U.S. is negative[33]. These and many other

examples of complexity, suggests that the relationship between racism and other forms of prejudice need to be clarified.

## 3. What's actually going on?

These countervailing views confirm that, although the "whitebacklash" is significant, it is crucial to incorporate other explanatory factors into a broader perspective. These factors are actually symptoms of a deeper societal crisis on both sides of the Atlantic. Three inter-related aspects of this crisis deserve particular attention: First, a widespread *culture of fear* which fuels and is fueled by conflicting group relations; second, a *revanchist syndrome* affecting politics, policies and social relations; and third, a subsequent *banality of violence* involving both actual and symbolic forms of adversity. These trends take place in a context characterized by a *transition to diversity*, a process that is deeply confrontational to, and rapidly transformative of the social fabric of Western democracies.

*The Culture of Fear.* The novelty of the present situation is only partially explained by the persistence of prejudice among all groups – as defined largely by their political affiliation, socio-economic status, and ethno-racial identity. It is also the product of a combination of an expanding repertoire of perceived threats and an extremely negative stereotypical process. These trends have two effects on the diffusion of a culture of fear: First, the category of the threatening "others" has been broadened. It today includes not only foreigners and ethno-racial minorities

31. Rasmussen Reports (2013) "More Americans View Blacks As Racist than Whites and Hispanics". Available at http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/lifestyle/general_lifestyle/july_2013/more_americans_view_blacks_as_racist_than_whites_hispanics. Access May 29, 2017.

32. Pew Research Center (2017) "Latinos and the New trump Administration", *Hispanic Trends.* Available at http://www.pewhispanic.org/2017/02/23/latinos-and-the-new-trump-administration/. Access May 23, 2017.

33. Pew Research Center (2015) "US Public Has Mixed Views of Immigrants and Immigration", *Hispanic Trends.* Available at http://www.pewhispanic.org/2015/09/28/chapter-4-u-s-public-has-mixed-views-of-immigrants-and-immigration/. Access November 3, 2016.

but also various in-groups who compete in the defense of their actual and symbolic position in Western societies. The "depiction of entire categories of people as innately dangerous" constitutes these groups' raison d'être[34]. Muslims, for example, are negatively perceived by 43 percent of Europeans. Many Europeans (59 percent) also believe that refugees will increase the likelihood of terrorism in their country. It is worth noticing that these negative perceptions are not a linear function of the actual size of migrant groups, nor they are sustained by evidence about the relationship between influxes of refugees and terrorism. In Hungary, for example, where non-nationals represent 1.3 percent of the total population, 72 percent have a negative opinion of Muslims, and 76 percent believe that refugees pose a terrorist threat[35].

Second, perceptions of threats have been expanded into many facets of economic, political, and social life in the United States. Economic resentment, for example, has less to do with objective economic conditions than with negative perceptions of the economy. The unemployment rate declined from 9.9 percent in January 2010 to 4.7 percent in December 2016; yet, during the presidential election, 44 percent of Americans believed that the job situation has worsened and 21 percent that it stayed about the same[36]. Among Brexit's

supporters, a growing gap emerged between the actual state of national economy and people's evaluation of their own financial position. This trend provided a fertile ground for the "Leave" campaign – notably using deliberate falsehoods about the UK's contribution to the EU. In turn, the "Remain" campaign multiplied predictions of economic disaster arising from leaving the EU as part of a "Project Fear"[37].

This culture of fear subsequently transcends the traditional divides (the poor and wealthy, whites and non-whites, as well as native and foreign born people) by fueling "post-truth politics." On both sides of the Atlantic, the traditional dichotomy between progressivism and orthodoxy has been fragmented in recent years into a multitude of sectarian attitudes based on alternative perceptions of existential threats. As Norris and Inglehart argued, "populism has a chameleon-like quality which can be and has been coopted by politicians of many different stripes and ideological persuasions"[38]. Yet, the most successful populist parties are those that combine in their rhetoric both material and cultural insecurities, as well as authoritarian values, resentment, social intolerance, and mobilizing anxieties.

*A revanchist syndrome.* Fear constitutes a fertile ground for revanchism. It denotes a revengeful sentiment, one that drives intolerant attitudes and policies aimed against those seen as posing a threat[39].

34. Glassner, B. (2010) *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things,* NY, Basic Books, p. 8. See also Furedi, F. (1997) *The Culture of Fear: Risk-taking and the Morality of Low Expectation,* London, Washington, Cassell.

35. Pew Research Center (2016) *Global Attitudes*, July 11. Available at http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/07/11/negative-views-of-minorities-refugees-common-in-eu/. Access November 11, 2017.

36. Pew Research Center (2016) *A Divided and Pessimistic Electorate, op. cit*., p. 4.

37. Perkins, A. (2016) "Osborne's Punishment Budget is Restoking ProjectFear", *The Guardian*, June 15.

38. Norris, P. and Inglehart, R. (2017) "Cultural Backlash: Values and Voting for Populist Authoritarian Parties in Europe", Paper presented at the APSA Conference.

39. Smith, N. (1996) *The New Urban Frontier. Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, NY,

There are left and right wing versions of revanchism, as well as complementary ethno-racial variations. All, however, include similar ingredients – a claim of as injustice, discrimination, deceit, suffering, resentment, and actual or perceived alienation. Defensive in-groups launch battles employing a strategy designed to delegitimize threatening out-groups. Revanchism often involves exclusivist urban policies (such as gentrification, school re-segregation, and fight against "deviants"), and entails political maneuvering against minority groups (such as gerrymandering) and vulnerable populations (such as restrictive measures targeting food stamps users). Intolerant policies also involve various forms of "reverse discrimination," as illustrated by legal battles in several states waged by whites claiming they are unfairly treated by affirmative action programs[40]. Intersectionality - originally conceived as a source of social empowerment through strength, community and tolerance - has been used by some movements as a rallying cry for exclusionary measures reinforcing harmful structures of race, class, and gender[41].

*The banality of violence.* Both revanchism and the culture of fear induce the banality of symbolic and physical violence. As Pierre Ostiguy and Kenneth Roberts argued, "for all populisms, paraphrasing their discourse, power should be brought back to the authentic or 'true' people who are deemed to be 'from here'"[42]. Most of them thus define "the people" in ethno-nationalist terms – leading to violent verbal abuse against the "others". According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), American hate groups –and particularly anti-Muslim groups– are on the rise (from 34 in 2015 to 101 in 2016) fueled in part by the recent presidential election. Trump had "electrified the radical right," during his campaign rallies that were "filled with just as much anti-establishment vitriol as any extremist rally"[43]. Hate crimes are also on the rise. More than 6,100 incidents of hate crimes were reported in 2016, up from more than 5,800 in 2015. According to FBI data, hate crimes motivated by hatred of a religion increased last year, with a rise in the number of crimes targeting Jews and Muslims. Of the incidents spurred by hatred of a particular religion, anti-Semitism was again the leading cause, motivating about 55 percent of those episodes, followed by anti-Muslim sentiment, which spurred about 25 percent[44].

Similar trends are noticeable in Europe. Germany, for example, reported a 77 percent increase in hate crimes between 2014 and 2015. In Great Britain, hate crimes increased by 40 percent in 2016 compared to 2015. The UN Committee on Eliminating Racial Discrimination attributed this increase to the "divisive,

Routledge.

40. Pincus, F. (2003) *Reverse Discrimination: Dismantling the Myth*, Boulder, London, Lynne Rienner Publishers.

41. For the original purpose of intersectionality, see Crenshaw, K. (1991) "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color", *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, pp. 1241-1291.

42. Ostiguy, P. and Roberts, K. (2016) "Putting Trump in Comparative Perspective: Populism and the Politicization of the Sociocultural Low", *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol. XXIII (1), p. 39.

43. Southern Poverty Law Center, *Annual report 2017*. Available at https://www.splcenter.org/. Access September 24, 2017.

44. FBI, *2016 Hate Crime Statistics. Available* at https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2016/topic-pages/incidentsandoffenses. *Access November 22, 2017.*

anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric" surrounding the Brexit referendum. Police data showed that about 82 percent of hate crimes were racially or religiously motivated, including ones related to anti-Semitism and Islamophobia[45].

# 4. What's next?

Fortunes of populist parties vary. In some countries, they remain "niche players" but in others they either threaten to topple rivals in mainstream parties or rule the country. The most influential ones are those that combine an aggressive populist rhetoric with xenophobic sentiments. They flourish in the current context of "democracy of suspicion"[46] whereby the norms of liberal democracy are subject to hostility on behalf of identity-based movements that express bitter grievances fueled by deep-rooted anger and insecurity. The root causes of the societal crisis that Western democracies are facing today are long term. They include growing socio-economic inequalities – fuelling actual and perceived risks of social deprivation; prejudicial policies enhancing a sense of alienation; counter-reactions to liberal values – leading to social intolerance and resentment directed towards various scapegoats (from the elites to migrants and refugees). None of these issues will soon disappear.

No one can foresee the end of the populist era, especially when considering the effects of the transition to diversity, a process affecting both the United States and Europe. Indeed, multiethnic grievances and post-racial conflicts are exacerbated by this great transformation of the American societal fabric. Evidence about America's demography vividly demonstrates that transition. The United States is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, as the result of four factors: immigration flows, the growing propensity for intermarriage, the subsequent multiracial baby-boom, and thus the sharp increase in the number of people who identify themselves as "multiracial" (as measured by the U.S. Census since 2000). As a consequence, no single ethno-racial group will comprise a majority of the population in the decades ahead. This trend is already evident, as illustrated by the multiplication of inter- and intra-group conflicts based on "reactive identification" as various groups attempt to secure their respective position into mainstream society.

In Europe, those who fear that their country is already "swamped" by immigrants are even more militant when they envisage the future. They express concerns that low fertility rates combined with high immigration streams will lead to a significant increase in the culturally – if not ethno-racially – distinct population. The specter of the "great replacement", raised by populists in most European countries, is gaining currency among policy leaders and public opinion. This suggests that European democracies will face further political disruptions and societal challenges.

45. CERD, *Concluding Observations.* Available at http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/GBR/CERD_C_GBR_CO_21-23_24985_E.pdf. Access November 12, 2017.

46. Osborn, T. (2017) "What Thucydides Can Teach Us About Populism", *Working Paper n° 01-17*, University of Bristol.