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# Modern American populism: Analyzing the economics behind the Silent Majority, the Tea Party and Trumpism

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**Modern American populism: Analyzing the economics behind the Silent Majority, the  
Tea Party and Trumpism**

by

**Willis Patenaude III**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: Political Science

Program of Study Committee:  
Ditonto, Tessa Major Professor  
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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2018

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**DEDICATION**

Dedicated to Brady.

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## ABSTRACT

This article researches populism, more specifically, Modern American Populism (MAP), constructed of white, rural, and economically oppressed reactionarianism, which was borne out of the political upheaval of the 1960's Civil Rights movement. The research looks to explain the causes of populism and what leads voters to support populist movements and populist politicians. The research focuses on economic anxiety as a necessary trigger but also examines the alternative theory of racial resentment. In an effort to answer the question, what causes populist movements and motivations, I apply a research approach that utilizes qualitative and quantitative methods. There is an examination of literature that defines populism, its causes, and a detailed discussion of the case studies involved, including the 1972 election of Richard Nixon; the Tea Party election of 2010; and the 2016 election of Donald Trump. In addition, statistical data analysis was run using American National Election Studies (ANES) surveys associated with each specific case study. These case studies were chosen because they most represent forms of populist movements in modern American history.

While ample qualitative evidence suggested support for the hypothesis that economic anxiety is a necessary condition for the populist voting patterns that elected Nixon, the Tea Party and Trump, the statistical data only supported the hypothesis in two cases, 2010 and 2016, with 1972 coming back inconclusive. The data also suggested that both economic anxiety and racial resentment played a role in 2010 and 2016, with neither having a significant effect in 1972. This suggests that further research needs to be conducted into additional populist case studies, as well as an examination into the role economic anxiety and economic crises play on racial resentment and racially motivated voting behavior.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

*“The political caste [can] go fuck itself.”* Beppe Grillo<sup>1</sup>

The pervading interpretation surrounding the recent populist surge across the globe, and more specifically, within the United States, is that populism is on the march once again. Many assume that it is just another blip, a fleeting moment in the landscape of American politics and is just another incendiary form of a movement of predicated on reactionary politics. Like its populist predecessors, The People’s Party, Andrew Jackson, Huey Long and Charles Coughlin, it is an unsustainable force of popular rebellion and like all populist movements, it will be but a momentary setback for elitist and technocratic governments as they defend their pragmatic legitimacy. But, what if this time, the populist revolt isn’t just the manifestation and magnification of short-term public hostility or cultural and social resentments? What if it is the result of a slumbering populism founded in the aftermath of the Civil Rights movement and underpinned by the political realignment of the 1968 election? I argue that the common interpretation that populism is “back” is incorrect, because populism never left. Since 1968, movements have gone dormant and politicians have shed populism as an explicit ideology, but they have continued to utilize its rhetorical strategies, and populist attitudes never receded in the conscience of certain voters, specifically, those tending towards anti-elitist sentiments. And this populism, known as Modern American Populism (MAP), is not driven primarily by simple hostilities or social and cultural resentments, but its motivated and predicated on economic issues; anxiety, inequality, and perceptions of unfairness. It’s also driven by a sense of white social decline and economically oppressed rural Americans.

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<sup>1</sup> Mounk, Yascha. “Pitchfork Politics: the Populist Threat to Liberal Democracy.” *Foreign Aff.* 93 (2014): 27.

The purpose of this research is to trace the formation, foundations, occurrences, and logic behind MAP and test the hypothesis that populism is caused by the existence of economic anxiety and conditions of socio-economic crisis rather than social and cultural issues. I will use multiple methods to test my hypotheses, including an examination of three historical case studies and statistical analysis of public opinion and vote choice during those three periods. I will establish the theory through the examination and then test it through statistical analysis for either confirmation or rejection of the hypothesis. It takes into account already established research on the topic while adding to it in the form of case study specification and statistical analysis that tests the theory of MAP for validity. In general, I find this to be a well-balanced approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methods which I believe is vital in social science research.

In Chapter 2, I discuss of various theoretical frameworks, approaches and scholarly definitions of populism, especially as they're applied to right-wing formulations. I have not included left-wing populism, because in the United States, it simply has not achieved the same level of success as its Latin American counterparts, either electorally or in policy changes. Unlike MAP, instances of left-wing populism since the 1960's, including George McGovern, Jimmy Carter and Occupy Wall Street, have been brief, tepid, and typically unsuccessful. Through this theoretical discussion, I settle on defining MAP as an anti-elitist, homogenous, popular backlash that utilizes an 'us vs. them' strategy which purifies the people as the 'in-group' (white, rural, poor, traditional values) while excluding others, or the 'out-group' (the ruling elites, immigrants, the establishment). It also requires the occurrence, or continuation of economic distress or crisis to trigger the populist attitudes of the 'in-group' who, in the midst of an economic crisis, have cause to turn their resentments, into a force of

critique and an effective revolt. Chapter 2 also includes an examination of prior research into the causes of populism, including evidence for economic causes, and the secondary cause of declining support for democracy among democratized nations, as well as racial causes.

In Chapter 3, there is a rundown of the methods used to test the hypothesis that economic anxiety is necessary for populism to occur. The methods include a review of three case studies and their underlying causes, as well as, statistical analysis of all three case studies testing the economics thesis utilizing American National Election Studies (ANES) and the 2010-2012 Evaluations of Government and Society study.

In Chapter 4, I discuss all three case studies - the 1972 election of Richard Nixon, or more specifically, the 'Silent Majority,' the Tea Party and the 2010 mid-term elections, and the 2016 election of Donald Trump and the arrival of Trumpism. The first case study concerning the Silent Majority, discusses the logic behind 1972 as the demarcation point between death of old style populism and birth of MAP, the motivations of the Silent Majority in electing Nixon and their economic circumstances which precipitated the rise of economic populism. The Tea Party section will discuss its causes, such as the Great Recession which began with the economic collapse of 2008, the declining social status of white America, the rural attachment to populism, and the electoral success of the movement in the 2010 mid-term election cycle based on economic factors, such as rising income inequality and the perceived unfair distribution of economic assistance. The final case study, examines the 2016 Presidential election, Donald Trump's triumph over Hillary Clinton and the foundations of Trumpism, the next epoch in MAP. This case study also discusses the rise in economic anxiety rooted in the failures of neoliberal policies and establishment institutions to maintain prosperity in an interconnected and globalized world and the political neglect by the ruling

elites. It also investigates the economic decline and challenges facing the poorest and most vulnerable citizens who are also the most likely to hold populist beliefs or vote for populist candidates. Combined, the three case studies demonstrate the sustainability, adaptability and transformational nature of modern populist politics. The addition of the historical research and scholarly literature is vital to provide background on populism, its causes, and the specific case studies as well as provide supporting evidence for the hypothesis and data analysis.

Following the case studies in Chapter 5, the results of the statistical analysis which used the aforementioned data sets will be discussed, either confirming or rejecting the hypothesis that MAP and the included case studies were caused by economic factors. Finally, Chapter 6 will conclude the research, examine the findings, and discuss whether further research is required on the subject and if so, what should that entail.

The importance of this research is to underscore the realities of economic decline, whether real or imagined, as neoliberalism and globalization advance without pause and the consequences associated with that advancement. MAP, at the very least, highlights some of the casualties of newly emergent technocratic regimes and the continuation of the mechanization of labor, as well as rising income inequality, wealth disparity, and financial opportunities, all of which have formed the basis of populist support pre-dating the demarcation point of 1972. While this paper does not discuss this demarcation in exhaustive detail, it's the chosen point because of the political realignment post-Civil Rights legislation and, according to the stated hypothesis, it should mark the point where economic justifications overtook social and cultural ones for supporting and voting for populist movements. What is occurring is a disenchantment and a loss of faith in economic policies

and politicians who have oversold and under-delivered, which has provided the impetus for MAP to be born and remain a force, whether large (Nixon, Tea Party, Trumpism) or small (Pat Buchanan, Ronald Reagan, Contract with America), within American politics since the 1960's.

It should also be of interest because MAP and more specifically, Trumpism suggests American politics is undergoing another upheaval or realignment, as political paradigms and traditional modes of understanding and interpreting the political landscape have been swept away under a torrent of populist backlash. American politics and the two-party system has entered a turning point where it will either respond effectively to the recurring problem of economic crisis and solve the issue with policies that actually benefit the people or Trumpism could be the manifestation of a new political age which extends beyond the borders of the United States. Rather than ending with a whimper, the long, slow march of MAP, regardless of its causes, could see the end of the era where “the powerful do what they wish and the weak suffer what they must”<sup>2</sup> and give rise to what Roger Griffin described as:

“... a revolutionary form of nationalism, one that sets out to be a political, social and ethical revolution, welding the “people” into a dynamic national community under new elites infused with heroic values. The core myth that inspires this project is that only a populist, trans-class movement of purifying, cathartic national rebirth can stem the tide of decadence.”<sup>3</sup>

Finally, the significance of this research, addressing the causes and conditions of populism will allow, in theory, the ability of governments, politicians and the

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<sup>2</sup> As quoted in Chomsky, Noam. *Hopes and prospects*. (Haymarket Books, 2010), 16.

<sup>3</sup> Frank, Stephanie. "The sacred in twentieth-century politics. Essays in honour of Professor Stanley G. Payne. By R. Griffin, R. Mallett and J. Tortorice (eds)." *International Social Science Journal* 61, no. 200-201 (2010): 325-328.

ruling elite, to focus policies on resolving those issues. For example, if populism is caused by racial resentment, policy needs to be dictated towards remedies such as further equality, diversity, and legislation designed to improve race relations. Perhaps, it becomes necessary to engage in further dialogue regarding minority centered legislation, identity politics and social constructions that give the appearance of racial preference to populist voters. Additionally, if racial resentment is the primary cause, there needs to be a reassessment of what causes sentiments of racism and prejudice and what more needs to be done in terms of combating this problem. Furthermore, should racism be the cause, it accepts the argument that economic conditions are of little, to no concern and no longer require significant attention because this is only a symptom of a bigoted nation clinging to its final grasp of power in a growing multicultural society. It is important to note, that racial resentment is not the same as racism. Racial resentment is typically devoid of biological factors and skin color, but premised on the appearance of economic advantages being given to specific racial categories.

However, if economic anxiety and economic circumstances are necessary for populism, then it falls on the ruling elites to admit mistakes have been made on the long road to neoliberalism and globalization. It suppresses the argument of racism, and draws attention to economic policies that created the conditions of anxiety, insecurity and decline and how they must be changed, altered or replaced. It's also a more encompassing outcome, as economic policy has the potential to adversely affect the economically disadvantaged regardless of race. It means coming to grips with the argument that capitalism is a flawed economic theory and can't not be defended by

simply dismissing the populist revolt as racist. It has the potential, in theory, to force the ruling elites, governments, and politicians to take action regarding the economic circumstances their citizens find themselves in, rather than scapegoating racism for populist feelings, allowing them to maintain the economic system which, in fact, is most responsible for the existence of populism. If it is economics, wholesale changes would have to be made to the way nations and governments engage in economics. Whereas, if it is racial resentment, it can be claimed that there is no economic anxiety, resulting in a business as usual approach because populism is simply a matter of individual citizen malfeasance, and not the malfeasance of governments and politicians.

## CHAPTER 2. POPULISM DEFINED

*“These unhappy times call for the building of plans that rest upon the forgotten, the unorganized but the indispensable units of economic power for plans...that build from the bottom up and not from the top down, that put their faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid.” FDR<sup>4</sup>*

In the discipline of political science, what constitutes populism has been debated and hotly contested, as scholars have gone back and forth, putting forward competing definitions and conceptualizations. This difficulty in settling on an accepted and operational definition has led some scholars, including Margaret Canovan, to declare the term “exceptionally vague” referring to a “bewildering variety of phenomena” easily attached to disparate movements regardless of legitimacy of the claim.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Grattan claims that part of the reason populism has been “notoriously” difficult to define is because of its lack of ideological dependency. But, Grattan also suggests that historically, regardless of how it has been defined, populism has tended to emerge in “disparate geopolitical contexts” and remains a cyclical feature of contemporary politics as a tactic for electoral mobilization.<sup>6</sup>

Although vagueness appears characteristic to populist descriptions, there are shared commonalities among scholarly analysis with only minor or trivial dissimilarities.

Accordingly, beginning with Philippe Schmitter’s definition, populism is a political movement that “seeks support beyond...the existing political parties” and procures support for a leader who claims to be capable of solving the problems that have historically eluded

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<sup>4</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt: "Radio Address From Albany, New York: "The 'Forgotten Man' Speech", " April 7, 1932. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=88408>.

<sup>5</sup> Canovan, Margaret. *Populism*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt P, 1981, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Grattan, L. "Populism and rebellious cultures of democracy." *Radical Future Pasts: Untimely Political Theory*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky (2014): 179-216.

the abilities of the ruling elite. In Schmitter's assessment, populism is defined by 14 characteristics which are separated into seven virtues and seven vices. Of the more prominent virtues are its ability to recruit previously apathetic individuals into the political process, weaken party loyalties, replace outdated party programs, and maintain a mindful awareness of social needs, all of which are encompassed by Modern American Populism (MAP), and are primarily concerned with economic necessities. Of the most corrosive vices applicable to MAP, and specifically Trumpism, are the promotion of scapegoats for causing negative economic conditions, the use of misinformation, and the opportunistic nature which undermines party loyalties and programs without necessarily offering viable alternatives.<sup>7</sup> A comparable approach is postulated by Weyland, who defines populism as a "political strategy [with] a personalistic leader [who] seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers."<sup>8</sup> Although this variant is more prominent in Latin American populism, because it is defined as a strategy and strategies are not geographically constrained, but are fully capable of transcending borders and ideological boundaries, it is also germane to American variations, such as MAP or right-wing populism.<sup>9</sup>

As a strategy, MAP utilizes rhetoric that defines the political contest over who controls both material and symbolic resources and sets the parameters of the political field on which that contest will be fought.<sup>10</sup> The content of that rhetoric is dependent on what

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<sup>7</sup> Pantelimon, Răzvan Victor. "„Populism and Neo-populism as the Main Characteristics of the XXIst Century Politics“." *South-East European Journal of Political Science* 2, no. 1-2 (1998): 121-152.

<sup>8</sup> Weyland, Kurt. "Clarifying a contested concept: Populism in the study of Latin American politics." *Comparative politics* (2001): 1-22.

<sup>9</sup> Azari, J. (2017, November 1). The Political Geography of American Populism. In *Global Populisms conference memos*. Retrieved February 16, 2018, from [https://fsi.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/azari\\_political\\_geography\\_of\\_populism\\_0.pdf](https://fsi.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/azari_political_geography_of_populism_0.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre, and Samar Farage. "Rethinking the state: Genesis and structure of the bureaucratic field." *Sociological theory* 12, no. 1 (1994): 1-18.

attributes the speaker has and how relatable they are to the audience and whether they have the credibility to connect with the experiences and narratives of the public to which they are appealing and contending for.<sup>11</sup> The populist discourse, according to Knight, is a “loose style characteristically involving a proclaimed rapport with the people, [in] a ‘them-and-us’ mentality” often during a period of crisis and political mobilization.<sup>12</sup> It is, by definition, a form of performance politics and a style that has become increasingly potent and prominent in the modern 24-hour media news cycle which has provided previously unavailable avenues for populists to seize on and “bring into being a subject called the people.”<sup>13</sup> It is, as Canovan states, a style of politics which is not ordinary or routine but it “powered by the enthusiasm that draws normally unpolitical people into the political arena.”<sup>14</sup>

The people, in almost every populist definition is “both the central audience [and] the subject that populists attempt to render present.” They are the true protectors of sovereignty, distinct from the elite, champion common sense, and are valorized against the crises caused by bureaucrats, technocrats, and the establishment.<sup>15</sup> The people, representative of the “non-privileged,” act against a perceived ‘enemy’ under an antagonistic worldview and they position themselves as protagonists, articulating “grievances against power-holders and oligarchs.”<sup>16</sup> This antagonism towards the system allows for the division of society “between the dominant and the dominated,” providing political salience to the hegemonic appeals

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<sup>11</sup> Snow, David A., and Robert D. Benford. "Ideology, frame resonance, and participant mobilization." *International social movement research* 1, no. 1 (1988): 197-217.

<sup>12</sup> Knight, Alan. "Populism and neo-populism in Latin America, especially Mexico." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30, no. 2 (1998): 223-248.

<sup>13</sup> Moffitt, Benjamin, and Simon Tormey. "Rethinking populism: Politics, mediatisation and political style." *Political Studies* 62, no. 2 (2014): 381-397.

<sup>14</sup> Canovan, Margaret. "Trust the people! Populism and the two faces of democracy." *Political studies* 47, no. 1 (1999): 2-16.

<sup>15</sup> Moffitt and Tormey, "Rethinking populism," (2014).

<sup>16</sup> Katsambekis, Giorgos. "The Populist Surge in Post-Democratic Times: Theoretical and Political Challenges." *The Political Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (2017): 202-210.

within populist political discourse.<sup>17</sup> According to Katsambekis, populism is a construction of ‘the people’ which is “mono-ethnic” and composed of an organic community with a common culture and shared values that excludes the ‘others’ while including only those it deems as “native people,” which is fundamental to MAP.<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, in a recent study, Pippa Norris, found that populism is comprised of three dimensions. It includes an appeal to popular sovereignty, is anti-establishment, and it requires a charismatic leader who represents the “voice of the ordinary people,” which is analogous to the vices of Schmitter’s analysis. Now, while this research focuses exclusively on the populism of the Right, Norris does not link populism to a particular ideology because whether it is left/right in orientation, at its core, populism is a “critique of liberal democracy” and is essentially about creating disruption and shattering the establishments “intellectual forms of power and hegemony,” and these ideas cut across ideological preferences.<sup>19</sup>

Similar to Norris, Gino Germani, states that populism does not tend to classify itself in terms of the left/right dichotomy because it is a “multiclass movement,” but, he also points out that not all movements of this type should be considered populist. According to Germani, authentic populism is concerned with, and promotes claims for political equality and universal participation for common people. He also notes, much like other scholarly definitions, how it is instilled with a semblance of authoritarianism and defined by a charismatic leader who champions the “rights of the common people against the privileged interest groups.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Stavrakakis, Yannis. "Antinomies of formalism: Laclau's theory of populism and the lessons from religious populism in Greece." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, no. 3 (2004): 253-267.

<sup>18</sup> Katsambekis, “Populist Surge,” 204.

<sup>19</sup> Inglehart, Ronald, and Pippa Norris. "Trump, Brexit, and the rise of populism: Economic have-nots and cultural backlash." (2016).

<sup>20</sup> Germani, Gino. *Authoritarianism, fascism, and national populism*. Transaction Publishers, 1978, p. 88.

This parallels with Boyte, who states the essence of populism, at the grassroots level, is “the idea that politics, owned by people, is the activity through which people...develop their power to shape the world.” In this context, it means the demonization of a common enemy, the use of inflammatory language and employing grievance style rhetoric that condemns the influence of corporations and market infiltrations throughout society. It is economic in nature, but at the sub-level, it also seeks the preservation of cultural traditions and narratives “that have been worn down...by dominant cultural dynamics” and acts as a source of anti-globalist radicalism intent on the political usurpation of the ruling class.<sup>21</sup>

Relatedly, Mudde defines populism as an ideology that separates society into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, pitting the ‘pure people’ against the corrupt elite and Mudde argues that all politics becomes based on the general will of the people.<sup>22</sup> In his assessment, populism acts as a “thin-centered ideology”<sup>23</sup> which allows it to exist without a “pure form,” therefore, it can be constantly mixed and updated with other ideologies and transcend existing regional biases.<sup>24</sup> Much like Mudde, William Brett, argues that populism is not dependent on a specific ideology to thrive, only that it includes an ‘us vs. them’ ethos in response to the “rise of individualism and consumerism,” both hallmarks of neoliberalism and globalization, which as it will be argued later on, are at the root of populist uprisings.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, Plattner contends that populism embodies a vision of democracy that is not committed to liberalism or constitutionalism because it is typically fighting against the

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<sup>21</sup> Boyte, Harry C. *Everyday politics: Reconnecting citizens and public life*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup> Mudde, Cas. "The populist zeitgeist." *Government and opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 541-563.

<sup>23</sup> Mudde, Cas. *Populist radical right parties in Europe*. Vol. 22, no. 8. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> Moffitt and Tormey, “Rethinking populism,” (2014).

<sup>25</sup> Brett, William. "What's an elite to do? The threat of populism from left, right and centre." *The Political Quarterly* 84, no. 3 (2013): 410-413.

beneficiaries of such systems, namely the wealthy and corporations. Consequently, it reduces all politics to a contest between “the rich and the rest.”<sup>26</sup>

However, for populists, especially within MAP, “the rest” or ‘the people’ are viewed as a homogenous or uniform group comprising a similar culture, economic standing, is overtly antagonistic and is imbued with all the features of nativism.<sup>27</sup> Though critics portray nativism as openly hostile towards diversity and it is essential to the racism thesis discussed later, the promotion of nativism is not without historical precedent. In *Federalist 2*, John Jay described Americans as a “united people” who share the same “ancestors...language...religion...manners and customs.” Social critiques notwithstanding, populist movements embrace a harmonized worldview as indispensable to the progress of economic equality.<sup>28</sup>

It should come as no surprise then that a contemporary definition of populism suggests that it is a movement of “revolutionary discourse...characterized by a mixture of forms of culture and ethnic nationalism”<sup>29</sup> with subtle elements of cultural populism. Fundamentally, populism is the proliferation of associated political feelings while appealing to populist symbols for the purpose of generating a cultural paradigm with the intent of taking control over cultural production. Like socio-politically generated populism, cultural populism magnifies certain aspects of national identity and amplifies the dilemmas involved

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<sup>26</sup> Plattner, Marc F. "Populism, pluralism, and liberal democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 1 (2010): 81-92.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Rossiter, Clinton, ed. *The Federalist Papers: Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay*. New American Library, 1961, p. 38.

<sup>29</sup> Latifi, Venton. “The Populism of the Political Discourse. Metamorphoses of Political Rhetoric and Populism.” *South-East European Journal of Political Science* ,2(1), 173-192. Retrieved October 23, 2017, from <http://seejps.lumina.org/index.php/volume-ii-number-1-2-populism-and-its-metamorphoses/71-the-populism-of-the-political-discourse-metamorphoses-of-political-rhetoric-and-populism>

in the neoliberal processes of “industrialization and democratization,” and intensifies the populist backlash when those processes come under duress.<sup>30</sup>

At this point, let’s turn our attention to the latest incarnation of MAP, that of Trumpism which can be summed up as a populism that is “a form of politics predicated on [the] moral vilification of elites and a concomitant veneration of the common people”<sup>31</sup> captured by top-down, reactionary logics.<sup>32</sup> It establishes binary constructions and classifications, essentially promoting a Manichean worldview that establishes an ‘us vs. them’ mentality, or as Laclau states, it is the “representation of popular-democratic interpellations as a synthetic antagonistic complex with respect to the dominant ideology.”<sup>33</sup> Trumpism also closely aligns with Vladimir Tismaneanu’s definition, which views populism as a strategy that generates mass mobilization and support for a leader among “heterogeneous social groups” in opposition to the existing political establishment. The social group in this context is predominantly whites and the heterogeneity comes from whites within the movement representing both the urban and peasant classes. This newly established social group responds to the real and perceived economic inequalities and problems of modernization<sup>34</sup> and its construction is closely associated with the psychological condition known as the “syndrome of disappointment” which arises as a consequence of cultural exhaustion, lost confidence, and an infiltration of democratic delusion among the masses.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Nirel, L. R. “Populism or the Fear of Democracy Failure.” *South-East European Journal of Political Science*, 2(1), 315-328. Retrieved February 21, 2018, from [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ion\\_Boboc/publication/261637390\\_Boboc\\_Populism\\_SEEJPS-II-1-2/links/00b7d534e4fb5d76cf000000/Boboc-Populism-SEEJPS-II-1-2.pdf#page=319](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ion_Boboc/publication/261637390_Boboc_Populism_SEEJPS-II-1-2/links/00b7d534e4fb5d76cf000000/Boboc-Populism-SEEJPS-II-1-2.pdf#page=319).

<sup>31</sup> Bonikowski, Bart, and Noam Gidron. “The populist style in American politics: Presidential campaign discourse, 1952–1996.” *Social Forces* 94, no. 4 (2015): 1593-1621.

<sup>32</sup> Grattan, “Populism,” 189.

<sup>33</sup> Laclau, Ernesto. “Towards a theory of populism.” *Politics and ideology in Marxist theory* (1977): 143-200, p. 172-173.

<sup>34</sup> Tismaneanu, Vladimir. “Hypotheses on populism: The politics of charismatic protest.” *East European Politics and Societies* 15, no. 1 (2000): 10-17.

<sup>35</sup> Dorna, Alexandre. *Le populisme*. PUF, 1999.

Once this point has been reached, populist movements will settle for nothing less than a complete renewal, transformation, or evolution of the political system.<sup>36</sup>

Effectively, populism is a political ideology that divides society into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, the ordinary people and a corrupt elite and is the expression of the general will of the people, which in this case is the homogenized white social group as they pursue radical change. This is a common theme among all definitions of populism, as is the underlying cause that provokes the pursuit of radical change, explicitly, the declining financial circumstances and the lack of economic mobility open to citizens in a globalized market system that has effectively become atrophied.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps, the most relevant definition for MAP, from the Silent Majority to Trump, is provided by Donald MacRae and is worth quoting at length:

“But surely, we will automatically and correctly use the term populist when, under the threat of some kind of modernization, industrialism, call it what you will, a predominantly agricultural segment of society asserts as its charter of political actions its belief in a community and (usually) a *Volk* as uniquely virtuous, it is egalitarian and against all and any elite, looks to a mythical past to regenerate the present and confounds usurpation and alien conspiracy, refuses to accept any doctrine of social, political or historical inevitability and, in consequence, turns to belief in an instant, imminent apocalypse mediated by the charisma of heroic leaders and legislators... If with all this we find a movement of short-term association for political ends to be achieved by state

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<sup>36</sup> Pantelimon, Razvan, “Populism,” 143.

<sup>37</sup> Krastev, Ivan. "Momentul populist." *CriticAtac*, January 13th(2011).

intervention but not a real, serious political party, then populism is present in its most typical form.”<sup>38</sup>

Before concluding, it is important to note a few criticisms of populism leveled by scholars. Richard Hofstadter, labeled populism a “paranoid style” that takes advantage of conditions of economic insecurity and anxiety to “distort people’s aspirations to power” leading to rebellious outbursts and defiant tendencies towards the ruling elites.<sup>39</sup>

Additionally, Benjamin Arditì argues that when confronted with “anomie” that triggers the mobilization of populist movements, people “misrecognize the truth” and are unaware of the consequences of their actions. Arditì also takes exception with the prevalent nativism of populism, suggesting that all notions of restoring a lost sense of community is a “mythical” pursuit and nothing more. As such, supporters of populism are victims of the “promise of plenitudes” and populism, rather than fulfilling the social and political demands of its adherents, is a form of top-down politics conducted by unprincipled leaders to advance their own agenda.<sup>40</sup> A final criticism is offered by Kenneth Roth, who refers to populism as a “cauldron of discontent” which relies on scapegoats, nativism, racism and xenophobia and he considers populism a political ideology founded on “unfettered majoritarianism” which will ultimately violate and erode the rights that protect the ‘other’ from becoming dispensable.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, no discussion of populism is complete without covering Laclau’s *On Populist Reason*. While Laclau, like Canovan, has suggested that populism is “elusive and recurrent,”<sup>42</sup> he also argues that populism is a political logic that seeks to bring about a

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<sup>38</sup> MacRae, Donald. "Populism as an Ideology." *Populism: Its meaning and national characteristics* (1969): 153-65.

<sup>39</sup> Hofstadter, Richard. *The paranoid style in American politics*. Vintage, 2012.

<sup>40</sup> Arditì, Benjamin. "Review Essay: Populism is Hegemony is Politics? On Ernesto Laclau's *On Populist Reason*." *Constellations* 17, no. 3 (2010): 488-497.

<sup>41</sup> Roth, Kenneth. "The dangerous rise of populism: Global attacks on human rights values." *Human Rights Watch World Report 2017* 12 (2017).

<sup>42</sup> Laclau, Ernesto. *On populist reason*. Verso, 2005, p. 143.

particular articulation of different elements in order to construct the unifying subject of ‘the people’ to mobilize against what are perceived as “unresponsive political institutions.”<sup>43</sup> Therefore, according to Laclau, populism is not dependent on its ideological content and should be defined instead on its form, as the construction of a ‘people’<sup>44</sup> that struggles against the institutional system<sup>45</sup> and institutionalized ‘other,’<sup>46</sup> that are symbolically dividing society. Under this formulation, the people, or the “plebs who claim to be the only legitimate populus,”<sup>47</sup> act as a political project that is entirely anti-status quo and consists of “postulating a radical alternative [when] the crossroads on which the future of a given society” have been reached.<sup>48</sup> While it is being argued here that populism is a pre-existing condition, it cannot move beyond petty demagoguery<sup>49</sup> without “some kind of de-institutionalization that unsettles the old order” to spur its success as the politics of change.<sup>50</sup>

As such, Laclau suggests there are three preconditions for populism to exist: first, there must be the creation of an “antagonistic frontier” that causes the formation of people versus the elites’ ethos; second, the people must articulate a set of demands that makes their existence possible; and third, once mobilization has been achieved, what follows should be the unification of the various demands into a “stable system of signification.”<sup>51</sup>

In summation, the root cause of Trumpism and the materialization of social demands attached to MAP, is the:

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>50</sup> Arditì, “Review Essay,” 493.

<sup>51</sup> Laclau, *On populist reason*, 74.

“...experience of a *lack*, a gap which has emerged in the harmonious continuity of the social. [The] fullness of the community is missing [and] the construction of the ‘people’ will be the attempt to give a name to that absent fullness. Without this initial breakdown of something in the social order...there is no possibility of antagonism, frontier, or, ultimately, ‘people’.<sup>52</sup>

### **The Economics**

*“Some degree of crisis...is a necessary precondition for populism.”<sup>53</sup>*

At the forefront of the recent surge in populist success is the very visceral reaction to globalism or globalization, which according to Jonathan Haidt, has given birth to a kind of “left behind thesis” for the working classes in Western societies. It’s a response to the promulgation of what’s termed “cosmopolitan attitudes” that shed traditions and pursues policies of progressive social engineering, eventually serving as a cosmopolitan “litmus tests” for moral respectability. This ignites populist passions, nationalist backlashes, and resentment towards the ideas of internationalism and universalism.<sup>54</sup> According to Donald Tusk this has taken place because globalists were so obsessed with the idea of “total integration” that they failed to notice that ordinary people did not share the same enthusiasm for globalist policies.<sup>55</sup> So, in effect, the populist surge is a direct result of the policies which led to the Great Recession and introduced the threats of rising inequality, increased economic volatility, increased frequency of crises, and the manufactured nature of booms and busts. All

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.,177.

<sup>54</sup> Haidt, Jonathan. “When and why nationalism beats globalism.” *Policy: A Journal of Public Policy and Ideas* 32, no. 3 (2016): 46.

<sup>55</sup> Evans-Pritchard, Ambrose. “Tusk Blames ‘utopian’ EU Elites for Eurosceptic Revolt and Brexit Crisis .” *The Telegraph*. May 31, 2016. Accessed April 09, 2018. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2016/05/31/tusk-blames-utopian-eu-elites-for-eurosceptic-revolt-and-brexit/>.

of which has brought renewed intensity to the debate surrounding the crisis of democracy and whether it can sufficiently uphold its promise of power to the people<sup>56</sup> and Trumpism, the latest movement in MAP, represents a “moment of rupture in the historical continuum [in] the present capitalist order” and has revealed it to be a “fundamentally bourgeois con.”<sup>57</sup> As such, populism is not the source of democratic “degeneration” as some critic’s claim, but is in response to an already degenerating democracy<sup>58</sup> and peels away what Carl Schmitt described as the “façade concealing the dominance of parties and economic interests” devoted to the neoliberal consensus<sup>59</sup> - or what Wolin termed “formless forms” of democratic government.<sup>60</sup>

According to Eva Anduiza, there are three factors that contribute to the formation of populist attitudes; personal vulnerability, objective personal economic decline, and sociotropic perceptions. The first, vulnerability, acts much like economic anxiety because it’s the byproduct of placing people in “competition over scarce resources” whereby the losers in this struggle suffer from some form of comparative dispossession. This competition is also an endemic cause of racial resentment as the Great Recession, coupled with the deleterious effects of globalization, triggered socioeconomic changes which produced losers of modernization and exacerbated class cleavages, leading to increased economic anxiety. The second factor of economic decline originates mainly from the “threat of deprivation” such as facing disadvantages from material strain, a reduction in basic goods and services, and being denied access to public assistance. The final factor, sociotropic perceptions, supports the

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<sup>56</sup> Ostry, J. D., P. Loungani, and D. Furceri. "Neoliberalism oversold? International Monetary Fund. Retrieved August 11, 2016." (2016).

<sup>57</sup> Gerbaudo, Paolo. *The Mask and the Flag: Populism, Citizenism, and Global Protest*. Oxford University Press, 2017, 14.

<sup>58</sup> Abts, Koen, and Stefan Rummens. "Populism versus democracy." *Political studies* 55, no. 2 (2007): 405-424.

<sup>59</sup> Schmitt, Carl. *The crisis of parliamentary democracy*. mit Press, 1988, 20

<sup>60</sup> Wolin, Sheldon S. *Politics and vision: Continuity and innovation in Western political thought*. Princeton University Press, 2016, 597.

economic thesis on a national level<sup>61</sup> and these perceptions have been confirmed in voting literature, most notably by Kinder and Kiewiet, who found a “prevalence of sociotropic perceptions” as they relate to the national economy and “pocketbook considerations” and their influence on voting behavior.<sup>62</sup>

All of this, whether separately or combined, produces economic anxiety, which I argue, more than any other cause, is a necessary requirement for all MAP movements. It is central to the marginality and alienation white-working class voters feel towards their “economic obsolescence and social relegation.” It is fundamental to their belief that they have been “demoted” to the fringes of society and judged as social outcasts and these feelings and beliefs have morphed into a “sense of social deprivation” and isolation from the democratic process and from being fully represented. This assumed demotion, along with the sorting of society along socioeconomic lines and the reinforcement of economic immobility, leads to the type of “violent anti-system political behavior” currently engulfing Western democracies.<sup>63</sup> This anxiety, especially for those professing right-leaning ideologies, leads to a retreat into economic nationalism, which according to Pia Malaney, is one of the strongest components of MAP and more specifically, the election of Trump. It should be noted that Malaney draws attention to the “racist rhetoric” that data suggests helped Trump during the primaries, but she also asserts that economic factors played a more important, and crucial role in the general election. Additionally, Malaney points out the economic anxiety of Trump voters is not based simply on attitudes of racial resentment, but on real world economic

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<sup>61</sup> Anduiza, Eva, and Guillem Rico. "Economic correlates of populist attitudes: An analysis of nine European countries." In *Team Populism January Conference: The Causes of Populism, Jan*, vol. 28, p. 30. 2016.

<sup>62</sup> Kinder, Donald R., and D. Roderick Kiewiet. "Sociotropic politics: the American case." *British Journal of Political Science* 11, no. 2 (1981): 129-161.

<sup>63</sup> Gest, Justin. *The new minority: White working class politics in an age of immigration and inequality*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

consequences caused by immigration. As Malaney argues, immigration negatively impacts the white working-class who are most susceptible to populist ideology, as it “pushes out the supply curve of labor causing an increase in output” while simultaneously “decreasing wages, [leading] to a transfer of wealth from native workers to capital.” Moreover, citing the 2016 Report of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, (NAS) Malaney draws attention to the social effects of immigration, namely in social spending, which according to the NAS report cost an estimated \$279 billion in 2013 and costs such as this, place a burden on state and local governments which impacts wages, consequently heightening economic anxiety.<sup>64</sup>

However, it’s not just about the direct, measurable effects, such as lost wages and job loss that translates into populist support, but there are also indirect economic harms, which cannot necessarily be measured, such as a reduction in economic security and stability or public feelings towards the “tearing of the fabric of civil society.” In fact, Malaney contends, that such indirect effects have been “systematically underestimated and neglected” because most research focuses solely on direct economic factors and ignores factors applied to “behavioral economics” or the “effect of loss” which eludes economic statistical modeling.<sup>65</sup>

Moreover, the economic causes of Trumpism were evident in the *2015 American Values Survey* (AVS) published by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI). Of the issues that the American people thought were most critical or important, ones tied to economic circumstances or ones directly related to rising economic anxiety were cited more than cultural or social concerns. Among the top issues, healthcare was important to 63-

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<sup>64</sup> Pia Malaney, “Economic Nationalism as a Driving Force of Populism in the U.S.” (Prepared for “Global Populisms: A Threat to Democracy?” 3-4 November, Stanford University),

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

percent and jobs and unemployment came in at 60-percent. When that is combined with the 72-percent of American's who maintained a bleak economic outlook and believed the economy was still in a recession and the 51-percent who thought there was a "lack of opportunities for young people," - including 45-percent of whites - there emerges a level of economic discontent favorable to the populist formation. Furthermore, challenging the notion that Trump's base was only comprised of the well-to-do, the AVS found that 55-percent of his supporters were actually from the white working-class.<sup>66</sup>

Even when social issues were discussed, such as immigration, negative views were expressed with and colored by, economic considerations and not basic racist logics. The negative views espoused by 80-percent of Trump supporters were linked to economic anxiety, citing issues such as jobs, housing and healthcare as the mitigating factor. This was also evidenced by who the American people blamed for the current economic conditions, as 86-percent blamed corporations for outsourcing; 77-percent blamed corporations for "refusing to pay a fair wage;" 73-percent blamed unfair trade policies; and 69-percent believed "burdensome government regulations" were the primary cause of the country's economic problems. Meanwhile, the issues relevant to the forthcoming discussion of the racism thesis, were substantially lower, as only 54-percent attributed the problems to illegal immigrants. Interestingly, broken down by racial group, a majority of both white and black Americans, 54-percent and 52-percent respectively, believed illegal immigrants were responsible for some of the economic woes, suggesting that this issue not only transcends race, but is also premised on economic calculation's rather than racial resentment.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Jones, Robert Patrick, Daniel Cox, Betsy Cooper, and Rachel Lienesch. *Anxiety, nostalgia, and mistrust: Findings from the 2015 American Values Survey*. Public Religion Research Institute, 2015.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

The AVS also revealed that anxieties about fairness, equality and equal opportunity were of significant concern across political parties and racial groupings. According to the survey, 79-percent of Americans believed the economic system was unfair and disproportionately favored the wealthy. The breakdown by political party was 90-percent of Democrats, 80-percent of independents and 63-percent of Republicans. Regarding equal opportunity, 65-percent believed that inequalities were a significant problem and affected the ability of everyday Americans at having an “equal chance in life.” The results across racial lines, showed racial agreement on the issue, as majorities of black Americans (87-percent), Hispanics (73-percent), white Americans (60-percent), and white working-class Americans specifically (64-percent), all believed there was a substantial lack of equal opportunity or equal chance in life.<sup>68</sup>

A side-effect of the neoliberal project which started to emerge around the same time MAP was in its Nixonian infancy, is a concept developed by Justin Gilbert known as ‘disaffected consent,’ whereby the governed express “profound dissatisfaction” with the premises of neoliberalism, but because they have been unable to conceive of a “convincing alternative” they succumb and acquiesce, begrudgingly legitimizing the neoliberal order. An order that Gilbert subtly reminds “nobody actually voted for” and which only generates greater generalized anxiety from its social and economic implications.<sup>69</sup> According to Gilbert, since the 1970’s, as MAP festered in the background, the global success of neoliberalism never increased its popular legitimacy, but instead, led to an unsustainable “life of endemic precarity.”<sup>70</sup> Essentially, the neoliberal project is a means of what Lazzarato calls

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Gilbert, Jeremy. "Disaffected consent: that post-democratic feeling." *Soundings* 60, no. 60 (2015): 29-41.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 32.

“the management of inequalities” in labor, wealth, social justice, and culture.<sup>71</sup> Historically, neoliberalism could prevent sustained populist surges by inciting a sense of complacency or ‘disaffected consent’ through market manipulation, neoliberalized education, and the slow “erosion of civil society” causing a feeling of general relative powerlessness, but after continuous crises, it can no longer easily dismiss populist materializations.<sup>72</sup> What has happened, could have been predicted, but came unexpectedly to the ruling elite, who could not envisage the level of electoral support for populist movements and politicians to increase or for the electorate to effectively disavow neoliberalism and conclude that populism could “perform better” during economic downturns and provide viable solutions to something like the Great Recession many Americans believe is still occurring.<sup>73</sup>

Furthermore, Matthieu Ricard emphasized the demise of the ‘American Dream’ as a result of a deregulated free market, prone to unpredictability, abuses and a predatory nature which systematically produces “inequality, exploitation, and the monetization of...human life.” It is the “commercialization of values” leading to a distortion of economic activity and financial inefficiency which rewards the few at the expense of the many. The accumulation of wealth, rather than benefiting the poor through the creation of jobs and stimulating the economy, instead “trickled up” to the very top. The neoliberal project has entered an era in which the “ends of making money justifies the means” and the financial crash of 2008 and the governments reaction, bailing out the banks responsible, in Ricard’s assessment, is symbolic of that attitude.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, according to Laura Grattan, populism is an attempt

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<sup>71</sup> Lazzarato, Maurizio, Arianna Bove, Jeremy Gilbert, and Andrew Goffey. *Experimental Politics: Work, Welfare, and Creativity in the Neoliberal Age*. MIT Press, 2017.

<sup>72</sup> Gilbert, “Disaffected consent,” 36.

<sup>73</sup> Kriesi, Hanspeter, and Takis S. Pappas. “Populism in Europe during crisis: An introduction.” (2015).

<sup>74</sup> Ricard, Matthieu. “Ayn Rand Killed the American Dream: Our Free-market Economy Only Works for the 1 Percent.” Salon. June 19, 2015. Accessed April 09, 2018. [https://www.salon.com/2015/06/21/ayn\\_rand\\_killed\\_the\\_american\\_dream\\_our\\_free\\_market\\_economy\\_only\\_works\\_for\\_the\\_1\\_percent/](https://www.salon.com/2015/06/21/ayn_rand_killed_the_american_dream_our_free_market_economy_only_works_for_the_1_percent/).

to “redeem democracy...from the hegemonic powers that undermine it.” It’s a bullhorn of resistance against the “gradual erosion of democratic aspirations” and the insulation of globalized capitalism from popular control.<sup>75</sup>

### **The Decline in Democracy**

*“Populism lives deeply in our fears and expectations.”* – Michael Kazin<sup>76</sup>

In order to understand the continual growth of MAP, one must identify the causes that contribute to its existence and while this research focuses on the economic theory, there is another underlying cause that is attached to that thesis and in fact, at times, they work in tandem. According to Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, the secondary cause is the decline in positive opinions towards democracy and democratic regimes. Foa and Mounk contend that the marked rise in populist movements is related to the declining “proportion of younger citizens who believe” or are invested in democracy and is accompanied by a wider “skepticism toward liberal institutions.” They’ve labeled this effect “deconsolidation,” and state that it’s not just a reflection of dissatisfaction towards failed government performance, but it is also an outright “denunciation of liberal democracy” as a system of government.<sup>77</sup>

This decline was unearthed in the World Value Survey which was conducted by Foa and Mounk. According the data, over the course of successive generations, a mounting “critical attitude towards democracy” and indifference has replaced positive and supportive attitudes. The survey observed that 46-percent of respondents reported that they either ‘never had’ or had ‘lost’ faith in U.S. democracy.<sup>78</sup> Among younger citizens, specifically those born in the 1980’s and later, only 30-percent believed it is “essential” or necessary to live in a

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<sup>75</sup> Grattan, “Populism,” 196.

<sup>76</sup> Kazin, Michael. *The populist persuasion: An American history*. Cornell University Press, 1998.

<sup>77</sup> Foa, Roberto Stefan, and Yascha Mounk. “The signs of deconsolidation.” *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 1 (2017): 5-15.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

country with democratic values and structures.<sup>79</sup> As a result, many Western democracies', including the United States, have seen a discernible rise in populist parties since 2007 and democracy has since been labeled an "empty vessel," incapable of responding to citizen concerns related to declining standards of living or the frequent economic crises.<sup>80</sup> Some of these issues, particularly the decline in the standard of living were detailed in the exhaustive research undertaken by Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez, who found that over the last 25 years in the majority of developed democracies, the median income had remained stagnant and median household incomes were actually lower in 2012 than they were in 1989. According to Piketty and Saez, this "loss of income has been compounded by a concurrent loss of security" which is ultimately responsible for the economic anxiety that reinforces populist support.<sup>81</sup> Since the financial crash of 2007-8, there has been a sense, according to Paolo Gerbaudo, that neoliberalism is failing and society has entered a "transition between two different political eras;" one in which the neoliberal dogma is replaced by populism to fill the vacuum left by the crises caused by establishment parties.<sup>82</sup>

An outcome of this decline in support for democracy, is an anti-austerity movement stemming from the economic and social distress of the 2008 financial crash known as 'citizenism,' with the primary goal of "reclaiming citizenship" - in the words of global activists, they "want to take back [their] institutions." Gerbaudo, further claims the emergence of this movement is a direct result of the ongoing "erosion of citizenship" as the ruling political and financial elite pursue irresponsible, unpopular and "anti-social economic

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<sup>79</sup> Foa, Roberto Stefan, and Yascha Mounk. "The democratic disconnect." *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 3 (2016): 5-17.

<sup>80</sup> Cellini, Marco, and Daniele Archibugi. "What Causes the Populist Infection? How Can It Be Cured?" *OpenDemocracy*. March 24, 2017. Accessed April 09, 2018. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/daniele-archibugi-marco-cellini/what-causes-populist-infection-how-can-it-be-cure>.

<sup>81</sup> Mounk, "Pitchfork politics."

<sup>82</sup> Gerbaudo, Paolo. "The populist era." *Soundings* 65, no. 65 (2017): 46-58.

policies.”<sup>83</sup> According to Gerbaudo, the citizenship movement is an extension of the populist revolt, arguing that both movements target the same groups, notably political and financial oligarchies and emerge out of similar conditions, namely in response to the advance of neoliberal ideology and the process of economic globalization which has devalued the sovereignty of nation states. The language of citizenship has also been adopted by populism because of its ability to perceive a “common ground” in the struggle of economic victimhood and destitution perpetrated by elites. It serves as a “source of collective identification” in what Gerbaudo suggests is now a revolutionary political struggle to reform democracy against the unelected markets that currently control the levers of globalization.<sup>84</sup>

Additionally, democracy has given rise to what Edward Goldberg termed the “newocracy,” or an aristocracy that claims, “superior insight” and benefits from continued globalization which has made life more expensive for the average citizen. This “newocracy” has established themselves as a ruling class who are the sole “arbiters of wealth and poverty,”<sup>85</sup> casually picking and choosing economic winners and losers. This has created what John Kenneth Galbraith characterized as Americas unique economic ability to have “private wealth amidst public squalor.”<sup>86</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones described this environment between the ruling or “parasitic” class<sup>87</sup> and the exploited class as something beyond simple economics, because it’s also symptomatic of the chasm between the “beneficiaries and the victims of corruption and the monopoly of political power.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Gerbaudo, Paolo. “The indignant citizen: anti-austerity movements in southern Europe and the anti-oligarchic reclaiming of citizenship.” *Social movement studies* 16, no. 1 (2017): 36-50.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>85</sup> Codevilla, Angelo M. “America’s ruling class—and the perils of revolution.” *The American Spectator* 43, no. 6 (2010): 18-36.

<sup>86</sup> Galbraith, John Kenneth. *The affluent society*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1998.

<sup>87</sup> Jones, Gareth Stedman. *Languages of class: studies in English working class history 1832-1982*. Cambridge University Press, 1983, 157.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

Katsambekis and Stavrakakis argue that the emergence of populism is usually treated as a form of “democratic malaise [or] social disease” that threatens the foundations of democracy and society in general by building a support base through the construction of an irrational Manichean worldview which takes advantage of an immature public and persuades and directs their “uncontrolled passions” towards undemocratic ends. However, this is not all without cause, as the scholars cite the “radical [and] brutal implementation of draconian austerity and neoliberal adjustment policies.” As a result, populism has witnessed a regrowth in an effort to reject the proposed hegemonic and oligarchic solutions to the problems inherent in neoliberal and globalist economic platforms. In terms of being threatening, populism is only viewed as a threat to economic and political elites who have chosen to govern without the people in the pursuit of a “brutal nihilism” perpetrated by the “pure elite” against the social and economic rights of the disadvantaged. In actuality, populism, when done right, can serve as a “corrective” against the ongoing corruption of the neoliberal elite.<sup>89</sup>

It is actually the malaise of democracy that gives rise to political discontent, which according to Rooduijn, van der Brug, and de Lange, causes an increase in populist voting, voting against the “powers that be,” and casting ballots as a “fierce critique” against the elite establishment. In their study, political discontent was signified and operationalized by three forms of recognizable discontent; first, people believe legislators do not care about their opinion; second, the perception that political parties only care about a person’s vote, and not their opinion; third, the belief that government policy is influenced by people who don’t look like the voting citizenry. Their study determined that people vote for populist parties because

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<sup>89</sup> Katsambekis, Giorgos, and Yannis Stavrakakis. "Populism, anti-populism and European democracy: A view from the South." *Populism, Political Ecology* 117 (2013).

they are “politically dissatisfied,” typically resulting from the belief that they are underrepresented, not represented at all, or simply ignored.<sup>90</sup>

According to Moffitt, key to explaining the populist surge as a reflection of declining support for democracy is the “evocation of crisis” and the increased distrust and cynicism aimed at governments believed to be in “thrall to global finance;” or the very people many citizens deem responsible for the financial recession and refugee crisis, causing widespread belief that there is a fundamental “crisis of democracy.” Populists, having increased their appeal since the 1970’s, and especially in the last decade as sovereignty and national borders have become less defined, have been able to post themselves as “the only true voice” between the people and the unrestricted “forces of globalization.” Furthermore, Moffitt argues that populist leaders, sensing their moment, have become adept at “exposing the deficiencies” of democratic institutions and appealing to an audience through implementing “emotionally resonant and relevant” political performances to audiences who no longer feel any connection to the democratic institutions or governments meant to represent them.<sup>91</sup> The survival of democracy, according to Plattner, “requires the maintenance of a successful balance between majority rule and...minority rights,” but this balance can suffer from disruption and when this transpires, it results in a form of political “hypertrophy,” which is currently occurring. This “hypertrophy” ensues when democracy “excessively weakens the protections offered for individual and minority rights,”<sup>92</sup> specifically through the course of privatizing natural resources, financial sectors and transferring responsibility over those areas to “international authorities.” The result, according to Lee Rahel Nirel, is an “acute feeling of

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<sup>90</sup> Rooduijn, Matthijs, Wouter Van Der Brug, and Sarah L. De Lange. "Expressing or fuelling discontent? The relationship between populist voting and political discontent." *Electoral Studies* 43 (2016): 32-40.

<sup>91</sup> Moffitt, Benjamin. "Face the Facts: Populism Is Here to Stay." *The Conversation*. April 09, 2018. Accessed April 09, 2018. <http://theconversation.com/face-the-facts-populism-is-here-to-stay-63771>.

<sup>92</sup> Plattner, “Populism,” 88.

deprivation” among the masses as the state abandons crucial sectors of social security and public importance.<sup>93</sup>

All of this delegitimizes the political force behind democratic governments, fosters distrust of the machinations of modern governance, and through the perception of crisis, breakdown, or threat activates the populist impetus,<sup>94</sup> and for some scholars, populism has finally reached a point where it needs to be taken seriously. Katsambekis believes this latest surge is no mere “episodic phenomena” that will soon disappear, but rather it is a direct response to a “political system that is characterized by a lack of responsiveness or accountability.” The moral integrity of elites has been called into question allowing populist leaders and parties to flourish and gain legitimacy as a movement that can “better understand and express people’s feelings of marginalization” in a neoliberal order where economic and political consensus is “forced.”<sup>95</sup> This alienation and “cartelization of political parties” has cultivated a political sphere that is perilously “unaware of people’s agonies and grievances.”<sup>96</sup> Consequently, American democracy has descended into what Robert Michels labeled the “iron law of oligarchy” as concentrations of power and dominance undermined the pillars of democratic institutions. Instead of being “servants of the masses,” politicians and wealthy elites, acting through cumbersome bureaucracy, “established monopolies...and dominated over the apathetic rank-and-file.”<sup>97</sup> In turn, due to the economic crisis and strengthening of identity politics, democracy has also entered a “nodal point,” whereby populist victories - provoked by a mistrust of elites, public dissatisfaction, and a vision to “exact revenge and punishment” against paralyzed democratic institutions which have

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<sup>93</sup> Nirel, “Populism,” 321..

<sup>94</sup> Taggart, Paul. *Populism*. PA: Buckingham, 2000, 95-98.

<sup>95</sup> Katsambekis, “Populist surge,” 206..

<sup>96</sup> Mair, Peter. *Ruling the void: The hollowing of Western democracy*. Verso books, 2013.

<sup>97</sup> Eiermann, Martin. "How Donald Trump fits into the history of American populism." *New Perspectives Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (2016): 29-34.

become “ungovernable” - will result in an “ideological, strategic, and...institutional redefinition of...democracy.”<sup>98</sup> According to Leszek Kolakowski, the fatal flaw in democracy is the “self-enmity of open societies” because they lack the effective ability to defend against “internal enemies” thereby transforming into their “antithesis,” ultimately fragmenting the public space and climaxing in the rise of populism. Nearly two decades ago, in the midst of economic uncertainty, Kolakowski warned that the crisis of democracy was not “temporary” and continued economic crises would reveal the “self-poisoning nature” of democratic governments, permitting the rise of alternatives to appear and gain political viability.<sup>99</sup>

### **The racism of populism**

*“Equal rights for all, special privileges for none.” – Andrew Jackson*<sup>100</sup>

However, there is a prevailing counterargument to what prompts populist movements and it is the racism hypothesis. MAP, critics assert, is simply an updated offshoot and reinvention of the populist movements of Andrew Jackson, the Whigs of the 1860’s and the People’s Party of the 1890’s. However, unlike those historical movements, MAP, detractors claim, is much more adept at cloaking the appearance of racism under the pretext of economic anxiety. As Greven has argued, Trumpism is nothing more than similar Republican attempts by Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush at exploiting the racism of southern whites built on the same emotional appeals and exaggerations that rely on a politics of fear, anger and “crass simplifications.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Krastev, Ivan. "The age of populism: reflections on the self-enmity of democracy." *European View* 10, no. 1 (2011): 11-16.

<sup>99</sup> Kolakowski, Leszek. *Modernity on endless trial*. University of Chicago Press, 1997.

<sup>100</sup> Axworthy, T.S. "We vs. Them: The Politics of Inclusion Versus the Politics of Resentment." *Policy Magazine*. August 31, 2017. Accessed April 09, 2018. <http://policymagazine.ca/we-vs-them-the-politics-of-inclusion-versus-the-politics-of-resentment/>.

<sup>101</sup> Greven, Thomas. "The rise of right-wing populism in Europe and the United States." *A Comparative Perspective [La emergencia del populismo de derechas en Europa y Estados Unidos. Una perspectiva comparada]*. Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Washington DC Office (2016).

Scholars like Greven challenge the economic anxiety thesis, arguing that it “ignores the enduring power of racism” and the threat it poses to democracy. Additionally, they contend that if the economic anxiety theory is correct, what then, explains the lack of support for Trump among minority communities that have been the most harmfully impacted by globalization and income inequality?<sup>102</sup> This has led some critics, like Mehdi Hasan, to assert that racism is the only plausible theory and support for Trump was almost exclusively a result of racial resentment. Hasan, citing data from the American National Election Study (ANES) and poll results from Gallup, claims there was a direct correlation between Trump’s appeal and voter attitudes about minorities, specifically, blacks, immigrants, and Muslims, as well as a “strong relationship between anti-black attitudes and support for Trump.”<sup>103</sup> Like Hasan, Philip Klinkner’s research found that economic factors were “statistically insignificant” in the political rise of Trump. Instead, Klinkner found that party identification and racial resentment were far greater indicators of support for Trump, especially among Americans who held “resentful views of African Americans,” where Trump’s support increased by 44-points.<sup>104</sup>

Additionally, Fareed Zakaria takes the economic thesis to task, contending that what matters more today and has since the 1980’s when voting patterns began shifting away from class, is social and cultural issues. While Zakaria admits that there has been an “economic stasis” resulting from pervasive globalization which limits and restricts the options

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<sup>102</sup> DeVega, Chauncey. "It Was the Racism, Stupid: White Working-class "economic Anxiety" Is a Zombie Idea That Needs..." Salon. January 06, 2017. Accessed April 09, 2018. <http://www.salon.com/2017/01/05/it-was-the-racism-stupid-white-working-class-economic-anxiety-is-a-zombie-idea-that-needs-to-die/>.

<sup>103</sup> Hasan, Mehdi. "Top Democrats Are Wrong: Trump Supporters Were More Motivated by Racism Than Economic Issues." The Intercept. April 06, 2017. Accessed April 09, 2018. <https://theintercept.com/2017/04/06/top-democrats-are-wrong-trump-supporters-were-more-motivated-by-racism-than-economic-issues/>.

<sup>104</sup> Klinkner, Philip. "The Easiest Way to Guess If Someone Supports Trump? Ask If Obama Is a Muslim." Vox. June 02, 2016. Accessed April 09, 2018. <https://www.vox.com/2016/6/2/11833548/donald-trump-support-race-religion-economy>.

lawmakers can choose from when an economic crisis occurs, Trumpism and its predecessors are not predicated on that economic stasis, but are based on cultural fears and nationalist romanticism. As post-materialist politics entered the scene, younger generations became focused on self-expression and issues of gender, race and the environment, producing what Zakaria claims was a “counter-reaction” among older generations. That reaction, at its core, according to Zakaria, is motivated more by cultural hostilities towards race, immigration and mass migration and less by economic factors, like anxiety and inequality. But, even Zakaria notes that some of this cultural anxiety is not without justification and submits that there is a direct correlation between “public fears and the pace of immigration.” Therefore, populism that appears heartless or xenophobic is simply reacting to the fact that in America, the number of foreign-born residents has increased from less than five-percent in 1970 to almost 14-percent in 2016 and every system intended to manage immigration has either failed or broken down because of the powerful economic interests allied with globalization.<sup>105</sup>

Furthermore, whether real or imagined, the economics of anxiety and the decline in overall economic mobility has led to successive generations to perceive the influx and arrival of immigrants and the emergence of minority-majorities as an assault on their standard of living and a threat to national identity.<sup>106</sup> This anxiety results in a type of patriotic nationalism that Monbiot claims is indistinguishable from racism,<sup>107</sup> because racism is often interwoven and bound up with moral concerns, and in the descriptive sense it, racism becomes a “shallow term” because nationalist fueled populism is not simply about skin color,

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<sup>105</sup> Zakaria, Fareed. "Populism on the March: Why the West is in Trouble." *Foreign Aff.* 95 (2016): 9.

<sup>106</sup> Mounk, "Pitchfork politics."

<sup>107</sup> Monbiot, George. "The new chauvinism." *The Guardian* 9, no. 8 (2005): 2005.

but it's also about the perception of minority values and whether or not they are compatible with the dominant culture.<sup>108</sup>

In response to some of the opposition, specifically that which is leveled by Grevan, Grattan argues that the historic populist movements, and namely the People's Party, which did laborer the "intensities of white privilege, racism, [and] nativism," was actually mobilized through popular outrage against an emerging "corporate culture" that was partial to the ruling elite, industry and banking sectors. The People's Party, in contrast to being an engine for virulent racism as claimed by Greven, was a vital mouthpiece in the opening salvo of populist resistance against escalating income inequality and their main fight was not founded on racial animosity, but was directed towards "rising corporate power [which] threatened to enslave posterity," similar to the foundations of MAP, from the 'Silent Majority' to Trumpism.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, in responding to the oft repeated claim that Trump voters, and by extension, those who support MAP are racist, as evidenced by a Gallup study which revealed that Trump supporters tended to be wealthier - seemingly undermining the economic anxiety hypothesis since it seems incredulous to suggest that such individuals could or would suffer from any form of economic worry.<sup>110</sup>

However, David Atkins suggests the Gallup study doesn't hold up under close scrutiny. First, while Trump supporters tended to be wealthier on average, that wealth came in the form of blue-collar jobs which have been disappearing for decades. Second, those same voters also reside in communities that are in declining health and experience lower

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<sup>108</sup> Haidt, "When and why nationalism beats globalism."

<sup>109</sup> Grattan, "Populism," 200.

<sup>110</sup> Atkins, David. "Racism Alone Doesn't Explain Trump's Support, Which Also Reflects Economic Anxiety." *The American Prospect*. November 4, 2016. Accessed April 09, 2018. <http://prospect.org/article/racism-alone-doesn't-explain-trump's-support-which-also-reflects-economic-anxiety>.

economic mobility.<sup>111</sup> Keane also challenges this assumption because it systematically dismisses the notion economic anxiety because, while some Trump supporters may have above-average incomes, in reality, the feelings associated with economic anxiety extends beyond income. In fact, income is not an adequate barometer with which to measure anxiety, since income hasn't changed relative to inflation and since the 1960's, "the bottom two-fifths are making...almost exactly the same" in 2016 as they were then. The problem is not income, but the purchasing power of that income.<sup>112</sup> It's also the case, according to research done by Eva Anduiza, that populist attitudes don't necessarily involve actual economic hardship, but merely the "perceptions" people have pertaining to their specific "economic situation."<sup>113</sup>

These perceptions give way to a sense of impending disempowerment and disruption of status, and according to Atkins, this spurs populist uprisings and the likeliest source for all revolutions is this mildly privileged class, not necessarily the poor.<sup>114</sup> Of course, this disempowerment can take on both economic and racial dimensions, however, sometimes they are interrelated. As David Dayen argues, throughout American history, its sometimes impossible to separate those dimensions as mitigating factors concerning candidate choice. Even issues like slavery and Jim Crow policies, while representative of social injustice and racial resentment, it's also the case that slavery was an economic institution and Jim Crow policies eliminated the "fear of competition for jobs." While both forms of racial injustice are certainly unacceptable, it's also true that when both institutions were eradicated, there was an

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Keane, Erin. "It's the Wealth Gap, Stupid: Inequality Drives "economic Anxiety" - both Real and Perceived." Salon. May 15, 2017. Accessed April 09, 2018. <http://www.salon.com/2017/05/14/its-the-wealth-gap-stupid-inequality-drives-economic-anxiety-both-real-and-perceived/>.

<sup>113</sup> Anduiza and Rico, "Economic correlates of populist attitudes."

<sup>114</sup> Atkins, "Racism Alone Doesn't Explain Trump's Support, Which Also Reflects Economic Anxiety."

economic impact on previously stable segments of society, namely the white working-class. As a result, the emergence of economic instability “creates the conditions for xenophobic populist animosity.”<sup>115</sup>

Moreover, Dayen, argues that this sense of disempowerment felt by those willing to support populism:

“plays out economically, with forces beyond the control of workers determining the movement of their jobs, the composition of monopolistic organizations, and the opportunities for the future.”<sup>116</sup>

Dayen also dismisses the notion that people vote with a singular motivation as opposed to being influenced by several factors, including “decades of tribal identification with one political party” and to suggest that racism is the only culprit, is to miss the point entirely and “will inevitably misinform reality,” effectively impeding any attempt at progress.<sup>117</sup> Of course, this is not to dispute the role racism plays in populist attitudes, but evidence suggests that perceptions of economic deprivation, vulnerability and anxiety resulting from a very real competition over jobs, wages, and resources, is what drives the fear of the ‘other.’

Zaslove argues, that rather than viewing the ‘other’ in racist terms, modern populist movements, both left and right, classify the ‘dangerous others’ as “special interest groups...international corporate interests and [aspects of] globalization.” This classification is explicitly detailed in the discourse and can also be found at the movements formation prior

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<sup>115</sup> Dayen, David. “The Disempowerment Decade.” TinyLetter. October 21, 2016. Accessed April 09, 2018. <https://tinyletter.com/DavidDayen/letters/the-disempowerment-decade>.

<sup>116</sup> Dayen, “The Disempowerment Decade.”

<sup>117</sup> Dayen, “The Disempowerment Decade.”

to full-scale mobilization.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, Gest argues that claims of racism function as a “mute-button” used to invalidate legitimate claims of economic depression and anxiety.<sup>119</sup> Gest also suggests that the white working-class has been placed in an unwinnable situation. As economic instability and inequality have become the de-facto settings of neoliberalism, if the white working-class complains about policies directed to the advancement and promotion of minorities, they are “labeled racists.” Similarly, if they blame their woes on the economic modeling of the free market, they are called “lazy” and their complaints are dismissed. With no avenue open for expressing genuine grievances, they are muted, forgotten, invisible.<sup>120</sup> What is often overlooked, according to Gest, is how “poorer white people are subject to the same elite classism” that has subordinated minorities for centuries and because their whiteness attaches them to the “in-group,” regardless of actual economic standing, they are rendered “invisible” and become “entrenched in their deprivation.”<sup>121</sup>

Additionally, assertions that MAP and Trump voters in general are only motivated by racial hatred and resentment, is a conclusion that rests on the assumption that such voters can be categorized and discussed as a “single unit.” In reality, they encompass a “broad spectrum of people with varying sets of motivations” and not only are the motivations varied, but they are also “economically defensible.”<sup>122</sup> A Pew poll conducted in July of 2016 found that the economy was considered a “very important” issue to 84% of voters, whereas immigration, a key component of the racism theory, finished sixth-most important and 90% of Trump supporters cited economic issues as very important.<sup>123</sup> Also, a Marketplace-Edison Research

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<sup>118</sup> Zaslove, Andrej. “Exclusion, community, and a populist political economy: The radical right as an anti-globalization movement.” *Comparative European Politics* 6, no. 2 (2008): 169-189.

<sup>119</sup> Gest, *The New Minority*, 68.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>122</sup> Robinson, Nathan J. “The Racism v. Economics Debate Again.” *Current Affairs*. April 8, 2017. Accessed April 09, 2018. <https://www.currentaffairs.org/2017/04/the-racism-v-economics-debate-again>.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

Poll conducted just prior to the election found that economic anxiety had increased in the months leading up to November and according to the Poll's Economic Anxiety Index, anxiety rose from 20-percent in 2015 to 30-percent on the eve of the election and it found that "30-percent of Americans were very fearful they would lose their job." In total, sixty-four percent of Americans reported feeling frequently anxious about the economy and their financial situation.<sup>124</sup>

In an interview with *Slate* in 2016, John Judis challenged the racism thesis arguing that what occurred with Donald Trump could be traced back to the early 1970's when capitalism first came under stress, in the form of the energy crisis. Since then, nascent populism has been bubbling under the surface as corporations, embracing the neoliberal strategy realized capital and labor "mobile." Concerning labor, Judis states this mobility allowed corporations to employ "low wage, less educated immigrants" which puts significant pressure on wages and has inherent social costs in the United States. While Judis does not deny the existence of anti-immigrant sentiment prior to the 1970's, he does state that the extent to which it has developed was only possible after the "deregulation of capital" and profit maximization of market liberalism that really began in the 1970's.<sup>125</sup>

According to Judis, the heart of Trump's message was not the incendiary and inciting rhetoric about immigration which the press reported on, but in the mode of Ross Perot and Pat Buchanan, it was a message of economic nationalism. Like other scholars, Judis supports the economic theory of MAP, claiming "populist movements [are] early warning signs that a

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<sup>124</sup> Fischer, Michael S. "Economic Anxiety Peaks as Election Approaches." ThinkAdvisor. October 14, 2016. Accessed April 09, 2018. <http://www.thinkadvisor.com/2016/10/14/economic-anxiety-peaks-as-election-approaches>.

<sup>125</sup> Chotiner, Isaac. "Has Trump's Celebrity Done More Than His Bigotry to Fuel His Success?" *Slate Magazine*. October 03, 2016. Accessed April 09, 2018. [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/interrogation/2016/10/did\\_racism\\_fuel\\_the\\_rise\\_of\\_donald\\_trump\\_john\\_judis\\_is\\_skeptical.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/interrogation/2016/10/did_racism_fuel_the_rise_of_donald_trump_john_judis_is_skeptical.html).

worldview is breaking up [and] is under attack” and you can’t reduce complicated political decisions to something as simple as racial resentment. Furthermore, Judis cited the General Social Survey (GSS) and Obama’s improbable victory in Ohio in 2008 to undermine the racism theory. According to Judis, the GSS indicated the racial resentment in Ohio was at such a level that an Obama victory should’ve been impossible, and yet, Obama won. As a result, Judis concluded there was a flaw in the racism theory and stated he had become “suspicious of social scientists who make [those kinds] of analysis based upon statistical studies” because reducing things to one cultural factor dismisses all other factors, such as class and the economic anxiety that certain classes are susceptible too.<sup>126</sup>

Confronting the issue of racial resentment and its relevance to white attitudes towards minorities and African-Americans in general, was research done by Carmines, Sniderman and Easter, who challenged the notion that “racism is the primary ingredient in white opinion on racial affairs.” In their research, they note that ‘old racism,’ based on biological inferiority, is no longer as prevalent and has been replaced by what some scholars have termed ‘new racism’, or racial resentment and animosity that is linked to traditional American values; i.e. white values. Values such as hard work, individualism, self-sacrifice and discipline that are seen as fundamental to the American character and society and it’s no accident that those values closely correspond with the sentiments of MAP. While some scholars still believe that biological forms of racism are still inherent in racial resentment, informing the prejudices and preferences of whites, Carmines et al, discovered that racial resentment is “not a valid measure of racial prejudice.” Furthermore, they argue that racial resentment does not provide “evidence about the extent to which racial animosity continues

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

to dominate the thinking of white Americans.”<sup>127</sup> Instead, rather than being a reflection of dormant racism, this racial resentment is not tied to biology, but to policy attitudes, which have economic implications. This is similar to the politics-centered interpretation put forward by Sniderman, Crosby, and Howell who argued that theories based on racism “overestimate the role of racial animus.” In fact, according to their research, it is non-racial, or “race-neutral values” that influence policy attitudes, especially with regards to affirmative action. Under this approach, opposition is not based simply on the race of the recipient, but on the belief, especially among white Americans, that it will lead to outsized and ineffective government bureaucracies which undermines core populist values, most notably, “individual initiative.”<sup>128</sup>

The survey published by PRRI also weakens the racism thesis as a primary motivator of populism, especially in terms of support for Trumpism. The survey found that as critical issues in terms of importance to the electorate, immigration and race relations, failed to constitute a majority (46-percent and 39-percent, respectively) and key cultural issues like same-sex marriage and abortion came in even lower, at 25-percent and 34-percent, respectively. Though the survey did find that 63-percent of white working-class Americans feel “bothered” when confronted by or coming into close proximity with non-English speaking immigrants, it’s more complex than basic resentment. Of those who felt bothered, only 43-percent were white college-educated Americans, suggesting there are inherent economic implications attached to the emotions of the white working-class, since they are the most vulnerable to job loss due to cheaper labor. Even so, as critical issues, racial and social

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<sup>127</sup> Carmines, Edward G., Paul M. Sniderman, and Beth C. Easter. "On the meaning, measurement, and implications of racial resentment." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 634, no. 1 (2011): 98-116.

<sup>128</sup> Sniderman, Paul M., Gretchen C. Crosby, and William G. Howell. "The politics of race." *Racialized politics: The debate about racism in America* (2000): 236-279.

categories failed to constitute a majority, suggesting that economic conditions were of far greater importance to the American public.<sup>129</sup>

Additionally, criticisms of economic anxiety, according to Ben Casselman of *FiveThirtyEight*, confuse economic hardship with economic anxiety, which are not the same. Casselman asserts that once you control for race, the data reveals that numerous economic anxieties drove support for Trump, such as voters with lower credit scores, more subprime loans, receiving disability payments, and lower earnings among full-time workers. As a result, support for Trumpism doesn't necessarily imply support in those sections of the nation in the "worst financial shape" but rather it refers to "parts of America where economic prospects are on the steepest decline."<sup>130</sup> Casselman also draws attention to the point that there is a host of non-race related economic issues identified by Trump supporters, as well as in every variant of MAP that are very real, such as the fact that "manufacturing jobs have disappeared, wages have stagnated, economic mobility has fallen, college costs have risen, and the retirement system is broken."<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, Shannon Monnat, states that counties that went harder for Trump "correlated closely with mortality rates stemming from drugs, booze, and suicide" resulting from the economic stresses of poverty, unemployment, and lacking health insurance. These communities, which are mostly white, according to Monnat, are "literally dying" as a result of failed economic policies.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Jones, Cox, Cooper, and Lienesch. "Anxiety, nostalgia, and mistrust: Findings from the 2015 American Values Survey."

<sup>130</sup> Casselman, Ben. "Stop Saying Trump's Win Had Nothing To Do With Economics." *FiveThirtyEight*. January 09, 2017. Accessed April 09, 2018. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/stop-saying-trumps-win-had-nothing-to-do-with-economics/>.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> Hazen, Don, Kali Holloway, Jenny Pierson, Jan Frel, Les Leopold, Steven Rosenfeld, Michael Arria, Ilana Novick, and Janet Allon. "13 Top Theories for How Trump Won and Why Clinton Lost: What's Your Theory?" *Alternet*. December 1, 2016. Accessed April 09, 2018. <http://www.alternet.org/election-2016/13-top-theories-how-trump-won-and-why-clinton-lost-whats-your-theory>.

### CHAPTER 3. METHODS

“...they have divided their nations into two classes, wolves and sheep.” Thomas Jefferson<sup>133</sup>

A majority of methods, such as the historical research, literature review, previously conducted statistical analysis and an investigation of scholarly articles were chosen to provide context, support and additional evidence applicable to the research hypothesis that MAP in general and, as it is applied to the three aforementioned case studies, is caused by times of economic crisis. Essentially, the main hypothesis is that economic anxiety is a necessary condition for populism and populist movements to emerge. A secondary hypothesis is whether or not the theory of MAP does begin in 1972. An alternate hypothesis being tested, is that racial resentment is the primary cause of populism and populist movements. These methods allow the paper to focus on how MAP emerged post-Civil Rights of the 1960's in response to declining economic conditions and discusses the events surrounding the cases studies, their political development, and mitigating factors behind their materialization, impetus and sustained existence. In addition, there is also an examination of historical research and scholarly articles dedicated to the alternative theory of racism as the cause of populist movements. Such methods were chosen because it is imperative to the research to have its roots in historical approaches, theories and interpretations of populism buttress the statistical analysis that accompanies it because data does not always tell the whole story, but when combined with additional research to test the hypothesis, it has the effect of adding credibility to the hypothesis or providing a basis for supplementary research and data collection in the event that the hypothesis is not confirmed.

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<sup>133</sup> “From Thomas Jefferson to Edward Carrington, 16 January 1787,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified February 1, 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-11-02-0047>. [Original source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 11, 1 January–6 August 1787, ed. Julian P. Boyd. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955, pp. 48–50.]

Additionally, statistical analysis was conducted on the three case studies - the 1972 election of Richard Nixon framed around the Silent Majority, the 2010 Tea Party dominated mid-term elections, and the 2016 election of Donald Trump - to test the economics hypothesis, as well as the racism theory. Along with the development of populism and its basic causes, each case study is discussed and analyzed using the historical research, interpretations of scholarly literature, previous data analysis. Additional statistical analysis conducted by the author used data collected by the ANES for the years associated with the case studies, as well as 2010-2012 Evaluations of Government and Society special study, which is applicable to the Tea Party case study, to test the viability of the hypothesis – that populism and populist movements are motivated by economic crisis and anxiety and not racism.

Starting with the earliest case study, the 1972 election of Nixon and the Silent Majority. The analysis for this case study was done using the ANES 1972 Time Series Study,<sup>134</sup> which actually created a few logistical problems with case study comparison. First, this survey is much older than the other two used in this thesis, so it does not include the same number and variety of questions as the new surveys. Second, there were two versions of the questionnaire given that year, and even though both questionnaires constituted a representative national cross-section, the complication arises because half the sample got a majority of race questions and the other half got a majority of economy questions. As a result, the variables used in this analysis are different (and less from those used in the other two analyses). In order to test the racial anxiety theory, I use a feeling thermometer for blacks

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<sup>134</sup> <http://www.electionstudies.org/study pages/1972prepost/nes1972.pdf>

in which respondents were asked how warmly they feel toward blacks on a scale of 1-100, where 100 = very warm (very positive) and 1 = very cold (negative).

Additionally, whereas 2011 and 2016 data asked respondents about the economy in general, the economic anxiety variable in the 1972 dataset is the mean of two questions asking about the respondent's personal financial situation. The questions were: "Does the respondent feel better or worse off than a year ago" and "Does the respondent feel they will be better or worse off a year from now." These are measured on a 1-5 scale where 5 = worse off and 1 = better off, also included in Table 1. Other variables used, either as control or supportive of the economic anxiety hypothesis in Table 1 included age, strength of party identification, income and education. As with all the case studies, but perhaps more specifically this one because it lays the foundations of not only the theory of MAP, but of economic anxiety correlating with populist movements, the analysis should support the hypothesis that economic anxiety led the Silent Majority voting for Nixon, and not racial resentment.

The second case study, concerning the Tea Party, used the ANES Evaluations of Government and Society Study, Survey 3 from December 2011<sup>135</sup> which was used to measure public opinion in advance of the 2012 election and included questions related to policy issues, the economy, and attitudes toward and evaluations of President Obama. First, an ANOVA analysis was run to test whether the model chosen was significant. Second, the r-square value was determined which shows how much of the variance in the dependent variable (DV) our independent variables (IV) explain. As the Tables will show in the results

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<sup>135</sup> [http://www.electionstudies.org/study pages/2010\\_2012EGSS/anes\\_specialstudies\\_2011egss3\\_codebook.txt](http://www.electionstudies.org/study pages/2010_2012EGSS/anes_specialstudies_2011egss3_codebook.txt)

section, both came back showing statistical significance, allowing the results to be interpreted.

The analysis used the results of an OLS (ordinary least squares) regression based on the number of respondents to the survey which was 649. The DV is the respondent's support for the Tea Party measured on a 1-7 scale (7 = strongly support, 1= strongly oppose). The IV in the model used to test the theory of economic anxiety, is the mean of two economic anxiety variables: "Would you say that as compared to one year ago, the nation's economy as a whole is now better, about the same, or worse" and "Compared to now, do you think the nation's economy will be better, about the same, or worse 12 months from now?" Both of these are measured on a 5-pt scale where 5 = much worse and 1= much better.

Additionally, Table 2 included racial variables to test the alternate hypothesis that racial resentment is the force behind populism. The racial resentment scale is made up of four racial resentment questions coded as variables c3\_zg\_1 through c3\_zg\_4 in the dataset. The questions comprising the racial resentment scale were: Irish, Italians, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors; Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class; Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve; It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites.

Racial resentment was measured on a 5-pt scale and coded such that higher values = more racial resentment. There are also several control variables in the model used such as - respondent age, their strength of partisanship, which goes from 1-7 such that 1 is a strong democrat and 7 is a strong republican, respondent income, respondent education level, and

whether the respondent is white and whether the respondent is male. Again, the analysis was looking for confirmation to support the economic anxiety hypothesis for populism while comparing it to the alternate theory of racial resentment.

In the final case study dealing with Donald Trump and Trumpism, the analysis used the ANES 2016 Time Series Study.<sup>136</sup> The DV in this dataset is whether or not the respondent voted for Donald Trump, so a logistic regression was used. Again, the sample size, or N value, which was 2811 respondents, was found, as was the “pseudo-r-square” value, or the equivalent of an r-square in an OLS for a logistic regression. Table 3 shows the regression coefficients for the IV’s to determine the directionality and magnitude of the relationship between the IV’s and the DV and checked to determine the significance to see which variables have a significant effect on the DV. The main variables of interest again dealt with racial resentment and economic anxiety. In comparison to the previous two studies, the racial resentment questions were the same set of questions as from the Tea Party data from 2011. While the questions about economic anxiety contained the same two questions as the measure in 2011, it also included a third question, which asked whether the current economy is good or bad.

For the purposes of this research, the Trumpism case study also looked at populism variables, which have been included in Table 11 as well. The data consists of a summary scale of four questions which measured respondents’ support of populism: “Most politicians only care about the interests of the rich and powerful,” “A strong leader is good for the US, even if he bends the rules to get things done,” “the people, not politicians, should make the most important policy decisions, and “The will of the majority should always prevail.” This

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<sup>136</sup> [http://www.electionstudies.org/study pages/anes\\_timeseries\\_2016/anes\\_timeseries\\_2016\\_userguidecodebook.pdf](http://www.electionstudies.org/study pages/anes_timeseries_2016/anes_timeseries_2016_userguidecodebook.pdf)

scale is measured on a 1-5 scale where 5 corresponds to the highest levels of support of populism and 1 the least. As with the previous two case studies, I expect to find high-levels of economic anxiety to support the hypothesis that such anxiety is necessary to populist incursions in the political process. Conversely, there is also an expectation that the data will reveal low-levels of racial anxiety.

This research design was selected due to the ongoing debate surrounding populist motivations and whether the causal factors are economic or social and cultural. The answer has the potential to influence public perception, political party alignment, government policies and the determine the sustainability of populist movements, especially if there is a misunderstanding of populisms underlying causes. Furthermore, in an era of continued political uncertainty, shifting political paradigms - by which I mean traditional methods of electioneering, analyzing and interpreting public participation and attitudes have been upended, giving way to successful populist approaches, both rhetorically and strategically, which defy conventional wisdom - and with growing public resentment towards all things regarding the establishment; i.e. elites, governments, institutions, banks and politicians, it is vitally important to understand the symptoms behind this in order to better address them and mitigate unforeseen consequences.

#### CHAPTER 4. CASE STUDIES: THE AMERICAN STYLE OF POPULISM

*“No movement creates itself out of thin air; all reflect the deeds of their predecessors, inherit part of their language, aesthetics, and tactics, and absorb their victories and defeats.”*<sup>137</sup>

According to Mounk, there are four basic categories of right-wing populism, but the two most common which will be applied to, and are the most representative of MAP, are labeled “national chauvinism” and “populist traditionalism.” The former propagates the claim that “political elites are insufficiently proud of their country” and too willingly align themselves with minority groups; while the latter seeks the preservation of conventional or traditional lifestyles creating out-groups they fear undermine the “innocent pursuits of ordinary folks.”<sup>138</sup> These two pillars of populism form the common starting point for the creation of the people or the movement, and in the American context, it constitutes a homogenous and virtuous community.<sup>139</sup> With regards to MAP, it is occupied by “the heartland” which Taggart suggests is used to convey the impression of an idealized people who romanticize the past and the movement, according to its own logics, is not composed of alleged radicals or extremists, but a silent majority, or the “so-called backbone of society.”<sup>140</sup>

MAP owes much of its existence to the history of right-wing populism or as Darren Warren called it “middle American radicalism.” Its historical roots lie in the farm revolts of the 1870’s against unsympathetic railroad companies and a series of other economic issues created by the “money power” or plutocracy, such as low-wages, rising debt, and prices being set by distant market forces.<sup>141</sup> This led to the formation of the People’s Party in the

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<sup>137</sup> Gerbaudo, *The Mask and the Flag: Populism, Citizenism, and Global Protest*, 19.

<sup>138</sup> Mounk, “Pitchfork politics.”

<sup>139</sup> Zaslove, Andrej. “Here to stay? Populism as a new party type.” *European review* 16, no. 3 (2008): 319-336.

<sup>140</sup> Taggart, *Populism*, 95-98.

<sup>141</sup> Judis, John B. *The populist explosion: How the great recession transformed American and European politics*. Columbia Global Reports, 2016, 23.

1890's which echoed the sentiments of Jacksonian democracy, the historical equivalent of Trumpism. In their stated platform, they wanted to combat the economic injustice, oppression, and poverty being perpetrated by the "controlling influences" who, in the pursuit of profit, were stealing the "fruits of the toil" of the plain people.<sup>142</sup> However, much like successive populist movements prior to the advent of MAP, they were undone by racially motivating factors and were co-opted by the two-party system that adopted the populist rhetoric, economic messaging and reforms to their own electoral advantage. Afterwards, the most notable case of populism occurred in the 1920's amid the stock market crash and was led by Huey Long, who railed against the oil companies, banks and the "money power" and championed the average man in a desperate fight to stave off being plunged into the "abyss of powerlessness" by the "economic royalists."<sup>143</sup>

Much of Long's rhetoric was incorporated into FDR's messaging and policy reforms and once again, as swiftly as it had arrived, populism faded back into obsolence. The final emergence of historical populism prior to the demarcation which ushers in the existence of MAP, came in the form of George Wallace, whose populism was overtly tinged with segregationist appeals and calls for economic equality. According to Wallace, it was a "movement of the people... against the tyranny of Washington bureaucrats." However, perhaps Wallace's greatest legacy was contributing to the political realignment that sent Richard Nixon to the White House and planted the seeds of what would become MAP, which was able to shed the manifest racism of Wallace and refocus on emerging appeals to economic tension and anxiety.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 31-32.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 33-37.

In research done by Scoones et al., they argued that MAP is playing out in rural areas; or those most affected by “extractive capitalism” and state policies geared towards what’s seen as increasing financial rewards for minorities at the expense of all citizens. It’s a reaction to the imbalance of forces between the state and the dominated classes and mobilizes around economic and “moral panics” amidst disenfranchisement and rural transformations. It is also a reaction to the neoliberal “commodification, appropriation and extraction of rural resources” which appears to provide an abundance for the general population but leaves the rural poor fixed in “grinding poverty.” The Great Recession beginning in 2008 led to full-blown rural “sacrifice zones” as work disappeared, homes were foreclosed, and inadequate medical care “destroyed the social fabric” of rural communities.<sup>145</sup> As a consequence, rural communities have experienced prolonged forms of “dislocation, neglect [and] challenges to identity” which have produced a desperate, downward spiral into poverty and economic precariousness.<sup>146</sup> It has, fundamentally, turned into a populism of despair.

According to Codevilla, American populism is distinctive because of its attachment to the country class and while it may be heterogeneous in terms of regional lifestyles, intellect and cultures, it is still relatively homogenous in terms of racial composition. This homogeneity, among other things, such as religiosity and sociopolitical leanings, has led the country class to being overly “conscious of itself” and perceptively aware of how the ruling class has deemed them “humanly inferior.” Codevilla argues, that this sense of inferiority, perpetuated by the fact that the country class has no “privileged podium” from which to confront inequalities, dismissals, and insults, has created anger and frustration directed

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<sup>145</sup> Scoones, Ian, Marc Edelman, Saturnino M. Borras Jr, Ruth Hall, Wendy Wolford, and Ben White. "Emancipatory rural politics: confronting authoritarian populism." *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 45, no. 1 (2018): 1-20.

<sup>146</sup> Scoones, and Edelman, and Borras Jr, and Hall, and Wolford, and White, “Emancipatory rural politics,” 7.

towards the ruling elite in the form of disrespect and a willingness to “curtail their power and reduce their perks.”<sup>147</sup>

Codevilla also suggests that the ruling class denies the legitimacy of opposition that emanates from the country class, labeling it as “uninformed, stupid, [or] racist” and historically, this has dispirited and discredited country class opposition because they have lacked a political vehicle from which to mount any serious uprising.<sup>148</sup> Elmer Clark, decades prior, came to a similar conclusion, stating that revolts originate mainly among the neglected poor, who suffer disproportionately from low education, isolated occupations and economic insecurity, and look to a “cosmic cataclysm which will exalt them and cast down the rich and powerful.”<sup>149</sup>

Furthermore, research done by Lipset observed elevated predispositions for supporting populism among rural communities faced with conditions of economic uncertainty and insecurity. Among this class, Lipset found “more direct frustration, aggression [and] venting of hostility” because of their economic isolation which provokes the mobilization of hostile predilections directed at the intellectual class whom they believe are responsible for their economic precarity.<sup>150</sup> Applying Laclau’s populist theory, specifically the composition of the people, or the ‘*populus*,’ the only legitimate form of this in American populism is one that is homogenous, or as this research argues, it is predominantly white and is driven by perceived notions of white decline and the complexities of economic anxiety attached to the impression of status devaluation.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Codevilla, “America’s ruling class.”

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Clark, Elmer Talmage. *The Small Sects in America: Revised Edition*. Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1949, 16.

<sup>150</sup> Lipset, Seymour Martin. “Democracy and working-class authoritarianism.” *American Sociological Review* (1959): 482-501.

<sup>151</sup> Laclau, *On populist reason*, 81.

More fittingly, the conception of American populism is best summed up by Kenneth Minogue:

“The American populists seem to have been responding, most immediately, to the concrete situation of rural poverty and low prices for what they produced...and to proclaim that they were reacting to ‘industrial America’ gave populists the possibility of alliance with other non-populist groups in American society...”<sup>152</sup>

### **The Silent Majority**

*“The time has come to draw the line. The time has come for “The Great Silent Majority” of Americans of all ages, and of every political persuasion to stand up and be counted against the appeasers of the rock throwers and obscenity shouters.” - Richard Nixon*<sup>153</sup>

The first wave of MAP occurred in the aftermath of the Civil Rights movement, amidst the realization of inevitable white decline and the looming presence of economic competition over resources. The resulting elections of Richard Nixon in 1968 and 1972, which were campaigns heavy on populist rhetoric, gave birth to the “Silent Majority.” It also gave rise to indelible characteristics of MAP in the form of attacks on Washington politics, and anti-statist enumerations, and it established group boundaries which identified internal and external enemies.<sup>154</sup> It is reactionary in form, innately assimilationist, exclusionary of emerging social groups and reinforces aspects of “white social democracy.”<sup>155</sup> Since the 1960’s, populism has been attached to the idea of ethno-nationalism and portrays itself as the last defense against globalism, and has been steadily progressing from a small, tepid

<sup>152</sup> Minogue, Kenneth. "Populism as a political movement." *Populism: Its meaning and national characteristics* (1969): 197-211.

<sup>153</sup> Richard Nixon: Remarks at Phoenix, Arizona. - October 31, 1970. (n.d.). Retrieved March 03, 2018, from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2797>

<sup>154</sup> Bonikowski and Gidron, “The populist style in American politics: Presidential campaign discourse, 1952–1996,” 1600.

<sup>155</sup> Grattan, “Populism,” 201.

movement unable to gain ground electorally, to a movement that is capable of “upending the politics of a country.”<sup>156</sup> Mudde postulates that the origins of contemporary populism lie in the upheaval of society and in the aftermath of the politics of the 1960’s, as national security threats, economic stability, and the “embrace of a business-friendly technocracy” was seemingly advanced at the expense of societal well-being. While MAP was incubated in the 1970’s, Mudde suggests that it was the 1980’s when it actually started to make its mark on a national level during the emergence of a “new elite consensus” founded on the “transfers of authority [from] national governments to supranational entities” which shifted government responsibility from being responsive to sovereign citizens, to being beholden to institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund.<sup>157</sup> Zaslove also argues that in the 1970’s, as the Vietnam War waned and post-war economic and political models began to “crumble,” a crisis of democratic legitimation was born, leaving a space for the arrival of populist parties.<sup>158</sup>

As such, the ‘Silent Majority’, according to Lowndes, is comprised of Middle America and evokes myths central to MAP; that of law-abiding, hard-working citizens who espouse traditional American values.<sup>159</sup> A central trope of MAP dates back to the Jacksonian era but experienced a rebirth during the Nixon years, and that is the concept of a “virtuous citizenry” or the virtuous middle, which extolled middle America as the responsible citizens of the nation.<sup>160</sup> This virtuous middle became the foundations of Nixon’s “forgotten Americans” theory, which, through the rhetorical strategies of Nixon became cemented into a

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<sup>156</sup> Fisher, Max, and Amanda Taub. : “Western Populism May Be Entering an Awkward Adolescence.” *The New York Times*. April 25, 2017. Accessed April 10, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/25/world/europe/populism-far-from-turned-back-may-be-just-getting-started.html>.

<sup>157</sup> Mudde, Cas. "Europe's Populist Surge: A Long Time in the Making." *Foreign Aff.* 95 (2016): 25.

<sup>158</sup> Zaslove, “Here to stay? Populism as a new party type.”

<sup>159</sup> Lowndes, Joseph. "White Populism and the Transformation of the Silent Majority." In *The Forum*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 25-37. De Gruyter, 2016.

<sup>160</sup> Olson, Joel. "Whiteness and the polarization of American politics." *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (2008): 704-718.

political formation, rather than an abstraction. It emerges out of the “social question” of the Civil Rights revolution and the rage that followed was able to find enemies beyond racial categories, such as government elites and Democratic liberalism, as the forgotten Americans fought against condescension and being alienated as a white political coalition.<sup>161</sup>

Common among Nixon’s populist approach was a rhetoric of polarization and strategies of affirmation and subversion. According to King and Anderson, affirmation is the selection and use of images that promote a sense of group identity, whereas subversion is the selection and use of images that will “undermine the *ethos* of competing groups.” Through affirmation, Nixon sought to revitalize the ‘forgotten Americans’ who he claimed were victims of the government and had become “ragged,” leading unfulfilled and empty lives, unable to achieve economic independence. They were the victims of violence, overcome by frustrations from the “unreason” of demonstrations in the streets. Through this antipathy towards outsiders and hostile groups, the ‘Silent Majority’ became a political movement, with a conscience and common identity. They also conceived of a common enemy, the hostile groups who they believed were in a “state of siege” on traditional American values and institutions.<sup>162</sup>

This formation of an enemy is a strategy of subversion and the enemy was exemplified by radical liberals who Vice-President Spiro Agnew at the time declared were “social permissivists” who excused minority violence, condemned the police and were responsible for the general erosion of decency and injection of lawlessness. They were also the congressional obstructionists, proponents of political disruptions, and lawless militants

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<sup>161</sup> Lowndes, “White Populism and the Transformation of the Silent Majority,” 30.

<sup>162</sup> King, Andrew A., and Floyd Douglas Anderson. “Nixon, Agnew, and the “silent majority”: A case study in the rhetoric of polarization.” *Western Speech* 35, no. 4 (1971): 243-255.

who were systematically corroding the power of American society. The corresponding strategy of affirmation, at least in the context of the ‘Silent Majority’, has withstood over the years, as successive generations of Americans continue to identify with the “self-images” Nixon brought into being in the 1970’s.<sup>163</sup> Another lasting legacy of this rhetorical approach, is how Nixon transformed the ‘Silent Majority’, for all intents and purposes, the white working-class majority in American society, into “victims of a tyrannical minority.” The ‘Silent Majority’, i.e. the hard-working, traditional value holding members of rural cultures were being shouted down by “indecorous protestors” who were violating the democratic process, undermining decorous deliberation, and essentially, committing rhetorical violence against the members of the silent majority.<sup>164</sup>

Echoes of the ‘Silent Majority’ can be found in Mueller’s argument pertaining to the logic of populism, suggesting a particular “moralistic imagination of politics” which pits the “morally pure” against elites who are “deemed morally inferior.” In Nixonian parlance, only the ‘Silent Majority’ represented the true people; the fully unified Americans who were the victims of the status quo, such as the downtrodden, excluded, and forgotten.<sup>165</sup> Another key facet of Nixonian populism that has remained a signature component of MAP, is the direct attacks on the media, journalists and press corps, or as Agnew referred to them, the “nattering nabobs of negativism.” Attacks on the media work as direct populist appeals because they are visual representations of political ideologies who project a superior intellect, thus appearing as “impudent snobs” to the voters most likely to support and vote for populist rhetoric

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>164</sup> Engels, Jeremy. "The politics of resentment and the tyranny of the minority: Rethinking victimage for resentful times." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2010): 303-325.

<sup>165</sup> Müller, Jan-Werner. *What is populism?*. Penguin UK, 2017, 19-20.

wielding politicians. They are, in effect, an easy target to vilify in an emerging era when politics has taken on a semblance of being rage filled and antagonistic.<sup>166</sup>

Scholars Kinder and Kiewiet conducted research into voter responses of the 1972, 1974, and 1976 elections, to determine what voters perceived was their most important personal problem. They were also trying to determine if the “primitive self-interest [of] pocketbook politics,” the notion that people vote as a direct reflection of their own personal economic condition or if they are driven by “sociotropic politics,” which replaces the personal condition with that of the nation’s economic condition. What they found was that both played a factor. In terms of personal economic problems, voters most often cited “inflation...high prices and rising prices,” leading to a decline in total purchasing power and the failure of wages to keep pace. In the 1972 election, Kinder and Kiewiet found that of the most important personal problems were linked to economics and in the succeeding elections of 1974 and 1976, that number rose from the 45-percent in 1972, to 59-percent and 53-percent, respectively, suggesting personal economic issues remained a source of discontent and frustration throughout the 1970’s.<sup>167</sup> Since the Civil Rights movement is serving as the demarcation point, separating historic populism from MAP, it should be noted how the distinction between visible and invisible policies and which racial group they benefit is a defining feature of the movement and actually generates some support for the economics rather than racism thesis. What civil rights demands indirectly caused, was shifting policies that directly benefited the ‘Silent Majority’, i.e. the white working-class, such as social security, Medicare, the GI Bill, and collective bargaining, out of sight. In contrast, racially blind economics policies that assisted minorities, including welfare in particular, became

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<sup>166</sup> Johnson, Robert David. "Nixon's the One." *Reviews in American History* 32, no. 1 (2004): 122-127.

<sup>167</sup> Kinder, and Kiewiet, “Sociotropic politics: the American case.”

visible and thus more easily attacked by groups that did not benefit overtly from such policies. On the surface, opposition to minority centered policies would appear racially motivated, but the visibility of economic benefits reserved to one racial category could just as easily stoke economic resentment as well.<sup>168</sup>

It should be noted that Kinder and Kiewiet argued that sociotropic, or national problems mattered more than personal ones, that data yields its own set of noteworthy results. While it is true that economic difficulties related to personal problems fell to 21-percent as a share when combined with national problems - as Vietnam was the overwhelming national concern with 24-percent - it is also true that post-Vietnam in 1974 and 1976, the most important national problems were exactly the same as the most important personal problems (coded as inflation, unemployment, taxes, and general economic problems) by a significantly large margin. In 1974, 68-percent of respondents identified one of those issues as the most important and in 1976, that number jumped to 74-percent. This suggests, that regardless of whether it was personal or national, once Vietnam is removed from the equation, voters were motivated by economic concerns and that is the underlying logic of Nixonian populism. Additionally, the CPS National Election Surveys Kinder and Kiewiet used for the study, found that in 1972, only six-percent of voters answered that racial problems or civil rights were the most important national problems and by 1976, that number was less than one-percent.<sup>169</sup> This implies that the landslide election of Nixon and the birth of MAP is founded on economic concerns, not racist ones.

Coincidentally, the white working-class of the forgotten 'Silent Majority' and populist inventions afterwards, weren't always forgotten. According to Rogers and Teixeira,

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<sup>168</sup> Lowndes, "White Populism and the Transformation of the Silent Majority," 32.

<sup>169</sup> Kinder, and Kiewiet, "Sociotropic politics: the American case."

at one time, especially from the New Deal until the 1980's, they were key to American politics. However, that all started to subtly change in the 1960's and dramatically shifted in the 1970's, the demarcation point from the overtly racist style of old American populism to the economically charged MAP. Rogers' and Teixeira's argument dovetails with other scholarly research as they note that it was in the 1970's when the economic realities of the white working-class changed. It was a reality that became defined by slow growth, declining wages, inflation, and stagnating living standards, which battered them economically and would continue to do so over the next several decades. Hence, the distinct similarities between the 'Silent Majority' and the Tea Party and Trumpism movements that follow.<sup>170</sup>

In the assessment of Rogers and Teixeira, the core values running throughout the 'Silent Majority' were passed over and often overlooked, especially with regards to Democratic politicians who became focused on "liberal social programs" targeted at minorities. By the mid-1990's, the silent majority demographic was also missing from most media accounts of current politics as well. This dearth of media attention, coupled with favorable economic policies that were visibly targeted at minorities, fed and fueled the perception, rightly or wrongly, of an unfair system biased against the white working-class. It's also worth noting that Rogers and Teixeira see an inseparable link between values and economics, or culture and economic anxiety and a real effort needs to be made to recognize this and work to "reunite" the values of the white working-class with their "economic experience" which has been at odds since the early 1970's.<sup>171</sup> What makes this case significant in the history of MAP, according to Eva Anduiza, is that the existence of populist

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<sup>170</sup> Rogers, Joel, and Ruy Teixeira. "America's Forgotten Majority." *The Atlantic*. October 03, 2014. Accessed April 10, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2000/06/americas-forgotten-majority/378242/>.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

attitudes, do not always result in support for populist parties. So, while the Nixon administration after the elections of 1972 and 1974 never controlled Congress, the effective use of the ‘Silent Majority’ laid the foundations for a future populist electorate and provided the “breeding ground” for future populist movements to become fully realized. With the foundation laid, all that was required was the existence of “opportunity structures” by way of economic factors and the “agency of political actors” who appear authentically populist.<sup>172</sup>

At the heart of Nixon’s populism, was a detestation of the “eastern elites” who lacked the faculties to deal with crisis, economic or otherwise. Rather it was the “uneducated” working-class who were vital to overcoming crisis and Nixon activated a form of bitter contempt for the intellectual establishment and “so-called managers” of the economy who were unable to prevent the economic stagnation, inflation and energy crisis. As Nixon saw it, the political elite were intent on taking the money of the working people and giving it to those who hadn’t earned it through hard-work. This was a cynical application of the Civil Rights agenda, but it served the function of providing an economic, or at least, a financial context from which ‘Silent Majority’ populism, or more aptly framed, working-class populism could operate.<sup>173</sup> This “blue-collar strategy”<sup>174</sup> targeted a constituency that was troubled over economic concerns, moral disruption, and the loss of financial security coupled with a sense of alienation as the pressing needs of this voting bloc, were seemingly ignored by an “unelected elite.”<sup>175</sup> According to Jerome Rosow, the economic status of blue-collar workers had been of concern prior to the 1972 election, suffering from what Rosow termed the “economic squeeze.” This economic category had reached a “plateau in their capacity to

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<sup>172</sup> Anduiza and Rico, “Economic correlates of populist attitudes.”

<sup>173</sup> Cowie, Jefferson. *Stayin’ alive: the 1970s and the last days of the working class*. The New Press, 2010, 126.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

earn by promotion or advancement” and wages had become incapable of keeping pace with the changing social situations of American workers, most notably, that of starting a family. The problem was further intensified by inflation, and between 1965 and 1970, money wages advanced 20-percent, but real earnings, which are typically measured in purchasing power “remained almost static.” As Rosow put it, blue-collar workers, who were mostly white, were “on a treadmill, chasing the illusion of higher living standards.” This made them, to use Rosow’s term, “overripe” for the rhetoric and political influence of populism.<sup>176</sup>

Furthermore, Rosow shed light on a pervasive problem that stirs the populist passion, and that was the problem of restricted economic opportunity. This restriction also infected preceding generations born into this economic class, as the children from this group, lacking the advantages of elites, were early victims of neoliberalism’s economics of inequality, as they were incapable of “making it” or advancing to the corresponding levels of their more economically secure counterparts. Additionally, the perceived racial resentment of the ‘Silent Majority’ has underlying economic factors, like the fact that in the 1970’s, according to Rosow, government assistance, in the form of minimum wage, job training, and welfare payments, were not available to the blue-collar, white working-class, because of the presumption that, by virtue of being white, they had “made it,” or, as it is modernly referred to, they already benefited from the notion of white privilege.<sup>177</sup> Moreover, Rosow commented on the economic insecurity integral to this groups composition, and rather than minorities being the first to suffer the degradation of economic decline, it was in fact, the white working-class who were the first to experience the increase in unemployment. Similar to modern Trump voters, the populist supporters of the 1970’s were already experiencing the

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<sup>176</sup> Rosow, Jerome M. "The Problem of the Blue-Collar Worker." (1970).

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

effects of globalization, the technocratization of democracy and economic anxiety, feeling “threatened by automation.” This sense of economic alienation and of being consumed by constant economic pressures and the frustrations at an unresponsive government, led Rosow to term them the very familiar, “forgotten people,” who were victims of “denigration” and a loss of status. Eventually, they would also form the bedrock of the ‘Silent Majority’ which would propel Nixon to re-election in 1972 on economic justifications.<sup>178</sup>

### **The Tea Party**

*“It’s a battle in a larger war. We’re in a war for the soul of this country [and] we need to purge both parties.”* Mark Williams<sup>179</sup>

The success of the Tea Party in the 2010 midterm elections was another manifestation of the “populist imagination” that was forged in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, but its targets were nonracial entities as much of the populist anger that fueled the movement was particularly directed towards liberal elites, corporations and state institutions. There was an acute sense among the activists that they had been betrayed by the very politicians and government officials they had elected to provide them with economic prosperity, opportunity and mobility, but they had only received financial ruin, rising inequality and had become victims of the economics of despair.<sup>180</sup> They were, in the words of Berlet, angry at:

“liberal elites, big money interests, a government that served the ‘big guys...they were anxious, angry, and resentful, raging against federal bureaucracy [and] liberal government programs...”<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Keck, Kristi. “Tea Party Battles for ‘soul of This Country’.” CNN. April 15, 2010. Accessed April 10, 2018. <http://www.cnn.com/2010/POLITICS/04/14/tea.party.rally/index.html>.

<sup>180</sup> Lowndes, “White Populism and the Transformation of the Silent Majority,” 34.

<sup>181</sup> As quoted in: Martin, Greg. *Understanding social movements*. Routledge, 2015, 173.

In the tradition of MAP, the Tea Party movement represented the second era of the so-called white backlash, compelled by a penetrating sense of economic insecurity, ingrained marginalization and alienation from being excluded in a world of modern identity politics.<sup>182</sup> It also represented, according to Guardino and Snyder, a concrete reaction to the “crisis of neoliberalism” as a result of the financial crash of 2008 and the Great Recession that followed. A crisis that was epitomized by a public realization that a massive redistribution of wealth and income had been and was still occurring. It was evident in the economic numbers, that showed the share of wealth held by the top one-percent had increased from 10-percent in 1980 to 23-percent in 2007. Meanwhile, over the same time frame, incomes for the bottom 90-percent had stagnated, igniting unprecedented levels of income inequality. This level of redistribution has been attributed to the growth of neoliberal policies and globalization since the 1970’s that introduced what Guardino and Snyder termed a “vicious cycle of dependency.”<sup>183</sup> Additionally, in the decades leading up to the collapse, the simmering economic anxiety and tension was also evidenced by the fact that from 1989 to 2012, the income of the poor dropped more than 8-percent and median household income had not recovered to its 2000 levels. Simultaneously however, income for the wealthy elite had risen by more than 25-percent over the same time period.<sup>184</sup>

Nonetheless, despite economic evidence for its existence, accusations of racism were prevalent, as they are with any populist movement. The Tea Party, it was argued, represented a white working-class that was organized and voted for parties and policies to preserve existing constructions of social power and privilege, even if they went against their own

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<sup>182</sup> Hughey, Matthew W. "White backlash in the 'post-racial' United States." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37, no. 5 (2014): 721-730.

<sup>183</sup> Guardino, Matt, and Dean Snyder. "The Tea Party and the crisis of neoliberalism: Mainstreaming new right populism in the corporate news media." *New political science* 34, no. 4 (2012): 527-548.

<sup>184</sup> Baker, Dean. "The Rise of Populism: The Masses Have a Case" CEPR. March 27, 2017. Accessed April 10, 2018. <http://cepr.net/publications/briefings/testimony/the-rise-of-populism-the-masses-have-a-case>.

economic self-interest, which according to critics of the movement, they almost certainly were violating their own self-interest. This violation, according to Lauren Langman, supports the notion that the Tea Party used economic appeals and the rhetoric of economic grievances in an attempt to “shroud its racism.”<sup>185</sup> However, Rasmussen and Schoen argued that racism is an inadequate assessment of the Tea Party, especially considering that survey data revealed nearly one-third of Tea Party members had formerly supported President Obama.<sup>186</sup>

But Langman also argued, that the anger and blaming elites is part and parcel of right-wing populism and has been since it emerged in 19<sup>th</sup> century America. One of its functions is to allow the lower middle-class to appear blameless and innocent for their circumstances while continuously placing the fault on the “parasites” above, namely, the elites. In the face of victimization, populist movements such as the Tea Party, according to Langman, provide a “realm of agency” used to exonerate the lower middle-class from culpability.<sup>187</sup> While this may be the case, it should be noted that among Tea Party members, almost 40-percent of them made less than \$50,000 a year, suggesting difficulties in assigning them blame.<sup>188</sup>

Instead, it’s more likely, that in the middle a faltering global economy that was all-too-eager to promote corporate interests, while the economic collapse devastated the white working-class and left millions unemployed or underemployed, that upon interacting with already established populist grievances, it detonated the economic anxiety that accompanies downward movement on the socioeconomic ladder. So, any loss of social power or privilege is directly linked to economic conditions. Therefore, in the absence of economic decline,

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<sup>185</sup> Langman, Lauren. “Cycles of contention: The rise and fall of the Tea Party.” *Critical Sociology* 38, no. 4 (2012): 469-494.

<sup>186</sup> Rasmussen, Scott, and Doug Schoen. *Mad as hell: How the Tea Party movement is fundamentally remaking our two-party system*. Harper Collins, 2010, 8.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> Jones, Robert P., and Daniel Cox. “Americans Say Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party Movement Share Their Values.” *PRRI*. 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.prii.org/research/november-2011-rns/>.

wage stagnation, and job insecurity, there would be no need for the scapegoating of economic woes.<sup>189</sup> Also, addressing the argument that Tea Partiers voted against their own economic interests, Guardino and Snyder suggest that white working-class voters prioritize differently than the ruling elites who subscribe to such a theory. Anyway, voting populist, in this case and others, serves as a method of expressing discontent and venting grievances towards a political system and economy that has rendered itself dysfunctional and inept. Externally, it acts as a protest vote, while internally, at least for the Tea Party and other right-wing populist movements, it is a way to fulfil what they view is their “role as guardians of American liberty”<sup>190</sup> and defenders of the real America - rural, white and Christian.<sup>191</sup>

Dean Baker, refuting the racism thesis applied to the Tea Party, argues that issues of economic anxiety, racism and xenophobia cannot be extricated, and explicit economic factors cannot, and should not, be dismissed as mere covers for covert racist activity. Baker cites the fact that President Obama was elected twice - which seems improbable if racism were as pervasive as critic’s claim - and the fact that immigration had actually “slowed substantially” because of the Great Recession. As a result, Baker argues that it is implausible to propose that the resurgence of populism is a simple overreaction based on racism and xenophobia.<sup>192</sup>

Furthermore, the economic anxiety and declining conditions were not imaginary constructs, but were very real circumstances and according to Baker, there was a “real economic basis for the anxiety” embraced by Tea Party members as the weak recovery resulted in not just a recession, but also the “upward distribution of income.” Baker cites

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<sup>189</sup> Berlet, Chip. “Taking tea parties seriously: corporate globalization, populism, and resentment.” *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 10, no. 1 (2011): 11-29.

<sup>190</sup> Guardino, and Snyder, “The Tea Party and the crisis of neoliberalism: Mainstreaming new right populism in the corporate news media,” 535.

<sup>191</sup> Langman, “Cycles of contention: The rise and fall of the Tea Party,” 474.

<sup>192</sup> Baker, “The Rise of Populism: The Masses Have a Case.”

numerous economic numbers to explain the depth and breadth of the recession that fomented the anger behind the Tea Party. An analysis by the OECD in 2015 showed that in nearly every democratized and wealthy nation, inequality had risen dramatically over the previous two decades. Meanwhile, the average annual growth rate between 2011 and 2013 averaged 1.8-percent, well below the IMF projection of 3.5-percent. While that figure is post-2010, it illustrates the nature of the economic decline and the inability of elites to solve the problem.<sup>193</sup> Moreover, according to a CBS News survey done in 2012, the top issues that Tea Party members referenced being angry about, were all economically related, including health care reform, government spending, unemployment and the economy. Among Tea Party supporters, 92-percent believed the country was on the wrong track and that figure among the majority of Americans was 59-percent, suggesting some agreement with the Tea Party. So, it wasn't just Tea Party members who had a negative view of the economic conditions enveloping the nation, but all Americans in general were pessimistic.<sup>194</sup>

Another major issue for the Tea Party, according to the CBS News survey, was a lack of representation or at least the appearance of being underrepresented and this started with President Obama, as only 24-percent believed Obama understood their problems. But, it didn't end with the President, as only one-percent approved of Congress, suggesting a massive gulf between the voters and those elected to represent them. And it wasn't just the Tea Party who felt this way, because Congress was universally disliked, as just 17-percent of Americans approved of their performance overall. So, resentment towards the government was not unique to the Tea Party, but was an overall sentiment shared among the nation.

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Montopoli, Brian. "Tea Party Supporters: Who They Are and What They Believe." CBS News. December 14, 2012. Accessed April 10, 2018. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tea-party-supporters-who-they-are-and-what-they-believe/>.

Additionally, contrary to the racism thesis applied to the movement, Tea Party supporters were more concerned with economic than social issues; 78-percent versus 14-percent, respectively and the economic anxiety that drove those concerns led to 93-percent to describe the economy as somewhat bad or worse and 42-percent believed it was actually getting worse. Coinciding with this sense of economic deprivation, 88-percent of Tea Party activists thought the economic stimulus had no impact on the economy, but again, this pessimism was also shared by a majority of Americans, as 62-percent had the same impression of the stimulus package.<sup>195</sup> Additionally, analysis conducted by the Center for Social Inclusion (CSI) found that the Tea Party was in fact driven by economic anxiety and insecurity. Their research showed that in the midterm elections of 2010, in districts suffering from economic insecurity, Tea Party candidates won “9 of 10 races,” whereas, in districts where economic insecurity was not an issue, they “lost all but three races.”<sup>196</sup> This indicates the wide-ranging pervasiveness of the economic collapse and considering a majority of Americans held similar opinions about the state of the economy, either non-Tea Party members are also racist nativists, or, economic anxiety was a major causation of the Tea Party populist revolt.

Furthermore, Solty argues the Tea Party, in “hegemonic terms,” wasn’t a racist surge against President Obama, but owed its existence to the failure of the Obama administration to inoculate the economically vulnerable and “construct [a] post-bubble economy” to stave off the effects of the recession.<sup>197</sup> This was exemplified by the *Wall Street Journal*, that termed the era “Generation crisis,” as employment shifted from a high-wage and full-time economy

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> “Race Reaction: Voter Responses To Tea Party Messages In Economically Stressed Communities.” Center for Social Inclusion. December 10, 2010. Accessed April 10, 2018. <http://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org/publication/race-reaction-voter-responses-to-tea-party-messages-in-economically-stressed-communities/>.

<sup>197</sup> Solty, Ingar. “The crisis interregnum: From the new right-wing populism to the Occupy movement.” *Studies in Political Economy* 91, no. 1 (2013): 85-112.

to a “low-wage, part-time epidemic.” According to statistics cited by the *Journal*, 28-percent of all jobs were lost during the Great Recession, and of the newly created jobs, 58-percent were in low-wage sectors of the economy.<sup>198</sup> This was accompanied by what Solty referred to as the “rate of exploitation” and the global crisis in declining wages as share of GDP. Citing the ILO’s Global Wage Report 2012-2013, in advanced nations, the wage share of GDP was almost 75-percent in 1975, but by 2010, at the height of the Tea Party, it had fallen to 65-percent. Incidentally, adding to the crisis, was the fact that Americans who were already experiencing financial difficulties, were somewhat forced to “accept lower wages and poorer working conditions” in efforts to prevent financial ruin and this promoted a core tenant of Tea Party populism; that of a lack of resources leading to “powerlessness and fear.” So, for Solty, the Tea Party, rather than being latent racists, were far similar to the “disillusioned Obama enthusiasts” who formed the nucleus of Occupy Wall Street.<sup>199</sup>

Acknowledging this disillusioned sentiment, Thomas Frank argued that the Obama administration shared some of the blame for the existence and success of the Tea Party because of its mishandling of health care and settling for what Frank called a “cold consensus” that failed to embrace or channel the populist anger. It was the fault of reverting to “technocratic explanations” to explain the health care legislation and that, predictably, alienated large swaths of the public.<sup>200</sup> Moreover, according to Chip Berlet, the situation was antagonized by elites who “trivialized” and dismissed the Tea Party as right-wing “crazies and fools”<sup>201</sup> or as “knuckle-dragging hillbillies”<sup>202</sup> which submerged Tea Party supporters

<sup>198</sup> Zuckerman, Mortimer. “A Part-Time, Low-Wage Epidemic.” *The Wall Street Journal*. November 06, 2012. Accessed April 10, 2018. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970203707604578094601253124258>.

<sup>199</sup> Solty, “The crisis interregnum: From the new right-wing populism to the Occupy movement,” 90.

<sup>200</sup> Frank, Thomas. *Pity the billionaire: The hard-times swindle and the unlikely comeback of the right*. Macmillan, 2012, 166-172.

<sup>201</sup> Berlet, “Taking tea parties seriously: corporate globalization, populism, and resentment.”

<sup>202</sup> Michael, George. “The Tea Party and the battle for the future of the United States.” *Estudios Ibero-Americanos* 41, no. 2 (2015): 307-327.

into a sense of alienation, providing them with the justification to marginalize the opposition; i.e. the ‘other’ or ‘enemy’ that all populism needs to exist. Accordingly, this enmity between the Tea Party and its opponents, is a manifestation of different cognitive frames, or more simply put, by a “preference for bucolic rural life [versus] urban diversity.” It also exemplifies how charges of irrationalism are overstated and how rural culture has always tended towards being “anti-urban” and harbors a suspicion of outsiders and urban culture because they perceive both as an “imminent danger” to their economic security and protection.<sup>203</sup> What’s often overlooked, but requires consideration, is how socio-economic and cultural changes have combined to act as an assault on the identities of the lower middle-class that formed the grassroots pillars of the Tea Party movement. After all, it was the lower middle-class that suffered most from the economic decline and coupled with a lack of access to healthcare and viable employment opportunities, they become forgotten, leading to the development of an alienated individualism. So, when the financial collapse hit and the prices for basic necessities such as food and fuel increased, financial hardship followed and it seems unreasonable that these Americans would continue to support the very people responsible for their economic conditions. According to Lundskow, the working middle-class suffers the most when economic mistakes occur, or in the case of the financial crash, when “greed and fraud” cause a global economic meltdown. It wasn’t the banks or corporations that suffered, considering that by 2010 they had seen a 65-percent increase in profits, but instead, it was this vulnerable group of Americans who saw a reduction in their way of life, and in part, instances such as this led to the populist resentment which sought a “new legitimate authority and an enemy to destroy.”<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Berlet, Chip, and Pam Chamberlain. "Running Against Sodom and Osama." (2006).

<sup>204</sup> Lundskow, George. "Authoritarianism and destructiveness in the Tea Party Movement." *Critical Sociology* 38, no. 4 (2012): 529-547.

Given the already established historical context and the fledgling MAP introduced by Nixon, it provided the environment during the financial crisis of 2008 for populism to evolve from something that what would have traditionally been a short-term trigger and turned it into essentially, an illiberal “turbocharged populist” response to decades of undemocratic neoliberal policies. Rather than dissolve quickly as a simple “episodic phenomenon” as some critics believed it would, Mudde argues that the global order had reached a critical juncture and the long simmering populist rage of the ‘Silent Majority’ had grown to the point of making major establishment parties “obsolete.” The Tea Party wasn’t the end, but was just the latest episode of American populism and it lasted far longer than anyone had anticipated.<sup>205</sup> Though the Tea Party did eventually fail as a long-term populist movement after their electoral success in 2010, rather than disintegrate, it simply went into a form of political exile, but because the feeling of being “strangers in their own land” never faded, the movement was simply refashioned in the form of Trumpism a mere six years later.<sup>206</sup>

### **Trumpism**

*“The only antidote to decades of ruinous rule by a small handful of elites is a bold infusion of popular will...the people are right and the governing elite are wrong.”*

- Donald Trump<sup>207</sup>

The composition of the Trump voter is often up for debate, but it undoubtedly includes those suffering from inequalities, marginalization and exclusion. It is rural areas which have suffered from economic poverty and fractured identities, that have made the formation of regressive, or populist politics possible.<sup>208</sup> A distinctive feature of MAP, from

<sup>205</sup> Mudde, “Europe’s Populist Surge: A Long Time in the Making.”

<sup>206</sup> Russell Hochschild, A. "Strangers in their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right." (2016).

<sup>207</sup> Trump, Donald J. “Let Me Ask America a Question.” The Wall Street Journal. April 14, 2016. Accessed April 10, 2018. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/let-me-ask-america-a-question-1460675882>.

<sup>208</sup> Scoones, and Edelman, and Borras Jr, and Hall, and Wolford, and White, “Emancipatory rural politics,” 12.

the ‘Silent Majority’ to Trumpism, is its attachment to white identity or white working-class voters<sup>209</sup> and Trump especially. Justin Gest in *The New Minority*, argued that Trump’s populist appeal resulted partly from his ability to speak to, and address the “acute sense of loss” that permeates post-industrial communities inhabited by white populations.<sup>210</sup> This demographic group, according to George Packer, are pessimistic because they feel unheard and “unspoken for,” left to sink alone amidst the cavalcade of “fraudulent promises” espoused by the ruling elite and neoliberal institutions which promised prosperity, but have only brought a life of precariousness, turning the white working-class in a euphemism for the “downwardly mobile, poor, [and] even pathological.”<sup>211</sup>

It is a group that since the 1970’s has experienced a degeneration of sorts, becoming what Charles Murray described as “socially disorganized, economically dependent, culturally deficient and genetically debased” as a population and no longer feel protected as a racial category.<sup>212</sup> Gest offered a similar assessment, arguing that the symptoms of marginalization and alienation were caused by “economic obsolescence and social relegation” as whites became convinced they had been demoted to the fringes of society<sup>213</sup> and every increased demand for equality was viewed as a method to “demote white people” to the status of social outcast.<sup>214</sup> This had the effect of reinforcing economic immobility and promoted political sorting along socioeconomic and ethnic lines. It also fostered the isolation of the working class and led to the segmentation of society, which unsurprisingly, led to violent, anti-system

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<sup>209</sup> Azari, “The Political Geography of American Populism.”

<sup>210</sup> Gest, J. (2016). p. 193-194.

<sup>211</sup> Packer, George. “Hillary Clinton and the Populist Revolt.” *The New Yorker*. June 19, 2017. Accessed April 10, 2018. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/10/31/hillary-clinton-and-the-populist-revolt>.

<sup>212</sup> Murray, Charles. *Coming apart: The state of white America, 1960-2010*. Three Rivers Press, 2013.

<sup>213</sup> Gest, *The New Minority*, 15.

<sup>214</sup> Gest, *The New Minority*, 22.

political behavior, - a literal political expression of marginality that is often masked as populism - that has upset democratic foundations worldwide.<sup>215</sup>

According to Chuck Collins, fundamental to Trumpism is the belief that the economy is rigged and it only benefits those who already have wealth at the expense of the disadvantaged wage earners who have been victimized by decades of accelerating inequalities related to income, wealth, and opportunity. More specifically, they are victims of policies that emerged in the 1970's, where the seeds of the current crisis of economic insecurity and anxiety that accompany it, were planted.<sup>216</sup> All of this economic suffering provides not only a catalyst for populism but for blame-shifting and the inculcation of a victimhood mentality which drifts towards "victimage" and a desire for revenge against any number of scapegoats, real or imagined.<sup>217</sup> As such, Gest argues that as class cleavages worsened since the 1970's, it fueled a sense of desperation among the white working-class who feel estranged and "resentful of ascendant minority groups," leading to an attitude of inferiority and an attachment to nostalgic references of the American Dream.<sup>218</sup> Furthermore, there is an awareness of loss associated with self-worth and the concept of "inherited poverty" which is especially prevalent among rural communities, and for them, democracy is just another "caste system" based on race, overlooking merit and ability in favor of rewarding minorities,<sup>219</sup> who in some cases, are seen to be unfairly "cutting in line."<sup>220</sup>

This sense of unfairness is central to the backlash against globalization, and more importantly to MAP, specifically as it relates to Trumpism. The opposition stems from the

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<sup>215</sup> Gest, *The New Minority*, 24 and 122.

<sup>216</sup> Collins, Chuck. "Trump and the Two Sides of Populism." Inequality.org. November 9, 2016. Accessed April 10, 2018. <https://inequality.org/great-divide/sides-populism/>.

<sup>217</sup> Engels, "The politics of resentment and the tyranny of the minority: Rethinking victimage for resentful times."

<sup>218</sup> Gest, *The New Minority*, 135 and 140.

<sup>219</sup> Gest, *The New Minority*, 157.

<sup>220</sup> Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, 686.

perception that globalization is elite driven, limits state sovereignty, is linked to growing bureaucratic power, destroys the organic nature of civil society and the natural economic order. It is implemented, operated and controlled by banks, elitist financial interests and multinational corporations who remain detached from the consequences that globalist policies initiate.<sup>221</sup> As a result, populist movements believe that globalization provides the right to unelected bureaucratic institutions, such as the United Nations, IMF or the European Union, to interfere in the internal affairs of nations with the sole purpose of establishing a “totalitarian democracy”<sup>222</sup> and installing a political system which promotes an ideology dominated by the “ultra-free market.”<sup>223</sup> Additionally, according to Zaslove, globalization propagates policies of “de-regulation...deracination and atomization” and global forces attack the collective identity of the national community, destroying the “village, the parish, [and] rural society” in the pursuit of elitist economic interests. Really, in the view of Branko Milanovic, the fundamental transformation taking place within the global economy as a result of the Great Recession and neoliberal economics, has been the greatest reshuffle of individual incomes since the Industrial Revolution.<sup>224</sup>

However, other scholars argue that the backlash to globalization has less to do with economics and everything to do with immigration, but immigration is inherently an economic matter. Proponents of globalization don’t support immigration in an effort to undo racism, but they do so because it brings cheap labor and sustainable power and in the process, local identities became displaced through a form of “cultural annihilation,” spurred on by

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<sup>221</sup> Zaslove, Andrej. “Exclusion, community, and a populist political economy: The radical right as an anti-globalization movement.” *Comparative European Politics* 6, no. 2 (2008): 169-189.

<sup>222</sup> Betz, Hans-Georg, and Carol Johnson. “Against the current—stemming the tide: the nostalgic ideology of the contemporary radical populist right.” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, no. 3 (2004): 311-327.

<sup>223</sup> Zaslove, “Exclusion, community, and a populist political economy: The radical right as an anti-globalization movement.”

<sup>224</sup> Milanovic, Branko. “The Greatest Reshuffle of Individual Incomes since the Industrial.” *The Greatest Reshuffle of Individual Incomes since the Industrial Revolution* | VOX, CEPR’s Policy Portal. July 1, 2016. Accessed April 10, 2018. <https://voxeu.org/article/greatest-reshuffle-individual-incomes-industrial-revolution>.

globalizations endless pursuit of profits.<sup>225</sup> Some populists, in response to the accusations of prejudice, argue that it is within their rights to “reaffirm forcefully the sacrosanct right of people to maintain and defend their...identity and not be reduced to a residual minority” in their own country. As such, they are not racists, but their defensive reaction is categorized as patriotic.<sup>226</sup>

The same economics hypothesis that I argue, was also explored in research conducted by Thomas Ferguson and Benjamin Page, who analyzed the American National Election Survey (ANES) for 2016 and tested for whether social appeals and attitudes mattered more for Trump’s success than economic arguments. The authors also mentioned Hillary Clinton’s attempts to magnify the incendiary rhetoric and expose the “sexist attacks...demagogic slurs...and dog-whistle hints of racism” as being crucial to Trump’s base of support. However, they also detail how this critically overlooks the concept of “material distress” faced by Americans, especially those living in economically stressed communities where it’s not just a lack of food, clothing, money and other goods, but a lack of access to quality education, employment and healthcare. This is where the authors note Trump’s “pro-worker stand” on issues that were relevant to American workers such as reducing economic harm from immigration and protecting workers from the wage-reducing impact of free trade agreements, such as NAFTA.<sup>227</sup>

According to Ferguson and Page’s data analysis, there is evidence to support the idea that Republican primary voters were “disconnected about the state of the economy” and were struggling to identify or find their place within the neoliberal construct. Addressing the issue

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<sup>225</sup> Zaslove, “Exclusion, community, and a populist political economy: The radical right as an anti-globalization movement.”

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ferguson, T., and B. Page. "The hinge of fate? Economic and social populism in the 2016 Presidential elections. A preliminary analysis." In *Institute for New Economic Thinking Conference, Edinburgh, October. 2017.*

of racism, the authors concluded that anti-Black attitudes had “no causal impact” on Trump’s primary victories and other social and cultural issues, such as terrorism, women’s issues, and abortion, were either “not a big factor” or were “not related” to whether voters supported Trump. In fact, the only social issue that seemed to correlate with support for Trump was how voters felt towards traditional feelings or traditional values.<sup>228</sup> What was a factor in the data, was a feeling of economic discontent, not only with President Obama’s handling of the economy, but also how voters perceived the economy was doing. The core of Trump’s support were those voters who believed the economy had gotten worse and would continue to decline, and they believed they were “worse off financially.” Although the authors did acknowledge instances of racially motivated voting attached to social anxiety and resentments, they concluded that these instances tended to have “economic roots.” This was especially the case in the general election where economic factors had a greater effect on voting behavior than it did in the primaries. In fact, in the general election, according to Ferguson and Page’s analysis, social issues actually cost Trump support and it was in the area of economic appeals where he was able to neutralize those losses. Demonstrating this point, is the fact that the level of discontent in the Fall of 2016 revealed that 74-percent of Americans “agreed that the country was on the wrong track.” Trump was aided by the fact that there was a widely shared view that Americas position in the world had “weakened.” In their final analysis, the authors concluded, that crucial to Trump’s victory was economic populism and the populist revolt was “more economic than social.”<sup>229</sup> Furthermore, citing Pew Poll results, Judis asserted that Trump supporters were “economic populists” as 48-

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

percent thought economic conditions in the U.S. were “poor” and 61-percent believed the economic system “unfairly” favored the ruling elite.<sup>230</sup>

Such economic conditions and opinions limited the ability of certain voters to conceive of the future or to believe in promises of progress, creating a “post-apocalyptic” feeling, most notably, among rural Americans, who only envisioned their present condition. A condition where the social fabric of community seemed to be torn asunder and where they have been “rendered obsolete” in an ever-expanding, integrated global world,<sup>231</sup> leading to the embrace of economic and political insecurity.

According to Mohammed Cherkaoui, Trumpism is a manifestation of the vengeful “forgotten white male” and the lost autonomy of hard-working citizens against the political establishment, ruling elites and globalization that has reduced wages for the ordinary citizen while “pulling up profits” for the those who implemented the very neoliberal economy that resulted in the Great Recession in the first place. It is a return to economic nationalism to undo the “politics of pain” associated with deregulation, privatization, austerity and corporate trade that have decimated rural sectors of the American economy. In rural counties alone, typically comprised of those who have constituted every American populist movement since Nixon’s ‘Silent Majority’, 90.5-percent chose Trump in the 2016 election over Clinton.<sup>232</sup>

Among rural communities, Trump gave birth to what Weber termed an “anti-economic force” from which the people could express their economic disenchantment and anger at a decline in economic stability.<sup>233</sup> The sense of economic nationalism that emerges

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<sup>230</sup> Judis, *The populist explosion*, 76.

<sup>231</sup> Gest, *The New Minority*, 74.

<sup>232</sup> Mohammed Cherkaoui, “Trumpist Populism and Economic Nationalism” (presented in *SUMMER SESSION CONFERENCE OF INGOss CONF/PLE(2017)SYN2/part2*., June 30, 2017). Retrieved March 10, 2018, from <https://rm.coe.int/speech-cherkaoui-plenary-conference-of-ingos/168073dce5>

<sup>233</sup> Weber, Max, Alexander M. Henderson, and Talcott Parsons. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. Translated by AM Henderson and Talcott Parsons. Edited with an introduction by Talcott Parsons. New York; Collier-Macmillan: London, 1964, 364.

in MAP has ties to the concept of American exceptionalism, or the ‘America First’ creed of the Trump doctrine, which was also exemplified within the Tea Party ethos and historically by Andrew Jackson, Trump’s historical counterpart, whose doctrine embodied similar Trumpism traits, including “toughness, whiteness and maleness” as well as being “deeply militaristic.” These elements unite the populist disposition through a deep-seated distrust and profound hostility towards elites.<sup>234</sup> So, at its core, Trumpism is the pure modern embodiment of Jacksonian populism, which according to Walter Russell Mead,

“...is based on the very sharp distinction in popular feeling between the inside of the folk community and the dark world without. Jacksonian patriotism is an emotion, like love of one’s family, not a doctrine. The nation is an extension of family. Members of the American folk are bound together by history, culture and a common morality. At a very basic level a feeling of kinship exists among Americans. We have one set of rules for dealing with one another; very different rules apply in the outside world.”<sup>235</sup>

In examining the triumph of Trumpism, Steven Hahn declared it was the finality of a seething white rage, as the hostility of white voters boiled over into an electoral “venting of discontent at the consequences of globalization and immigration,” but Hahn declares as such, with an understanding that the two issues are inherently linked, since increased globalization of markets also increases the level of immigration. It was a rage against the economic consumerism, political isolation and distrust of government that has seemingly replaced the traditional values of hard work, faith, and self-reliance. Similar to the Tea Party, Trump voters were not driven by rudimentary racism, but by anger at the establishment and the

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<sup>234</sup> Lieven, Anatol. "Clinton and Trump: Two faces of American nationalism." *Survival* 58, no. 5 (2016): 7-22.

<sup>235</sup> Mead, Walter Russell. "Special Providence: the American foreign policy tradition." (2002), 236 and 245.

“elite pedigree” of politicians, and this is what triggered their “insecurities and sense of cultural inferiority.” While Hahn recognizes the role “black advancement” plays in this rage, it is often tied to the issues of economic independence and opportunity, and when this is increased for one segment of society, it logically necessitates a decrease for another segment. Moreover, the existence of this “racist rage,” has not occurred independently, but has required times of crisis and distress to materialize since the end of the 1960’s.<sup>236</sup> In fact, according to Matthew Hughey, any sense of racial resentment or backlash is almost always dependent on the levels of “economic inequality” and when “economic resources” appear to be distributed to the exclusion of whites. This highlights a central issue with the politics of globalization, as it pits rival racial groups against one another, as they fight over “shrinking resources.”<sup>237</sup>

While it is commonplace among scholars to suggest that populism requires a crisis and the conditions of “systemic failure,” what makes situations like Trumpism possible is not just a crisis, but the “spectacularization of failure” that becomes culturally or politically mediated. This is what allows populist actors, from Nixon to Trump, to make the failure “appear symptomatic of a wider problem”<sup>238</sup> and utilize rhetorical metaphors to invoke what James Brassett and Chris Clarke described as a “sense of shared trauma and concern” giving meaning and identity to those most vulnerable in declining economic conditions.<sup>239</sup> This also coincides with the argument put forth by Oliver and Rahn, who attribute the rise of Trump to a “representation gap” – periods when the public has felt underrepresented by elected

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<sup>236</sup> Hahn, Steven. “The Rage of White Folk.” *The Nation*. September 27, 2017. Accessed April 10, 2018. <https://www.thenation.com/article/the-rage-of-white-folks/>.

<sup>237</sup> Hughey, “White backlash in the ‘post-racial’ United States,” 727.

<sup>238</sup> Moffitt, Benjamin. “How to perform crisis: A model for understanding the key role of crisis in contemporary populism.” *Government and Opposition* 50, no. 2 (2015): 189-217.

<sup>239</sup> Brassett, James, and Chris Clarke. “Performing the sub-prime crisis: trauma and the financial event.” *International Political Sociology* 6, no. 1 (2012): 4-20.

officials, specifically Congress. The authors found that since 2008, the levels of unresponsiveness reported by the public has been steadily increasing, giving reason to suggest that 2016 represented a tipping point in public sentiment against the traditional modes of neoliberal economics. Furthermore, the long period of economic recession and marginalization spurred by a growing lack of wealth and political power possessed by the public, allowed Trump's candidacy to gain traction and a following, unlike, according to Oliver and Rahn, his previous attempt in 2000 when the representation gap was at an all-time low. Because the representation gap correlates with economic issues, financial pessimism, and mistrust of experts, rather than social and cultural issues, it made Trump's 2016 run for president more viable than his attempt in 2000.<sup>240</sup>

However, some view Trumpism not as a final, positive culmination of Nixon's 'Silent Majority' come to fruition, but as the "politics of intolerance." While Roth notes there does exist discontent within American society directed at economic stagnation, he also asserts that Trumpism is a national "breach on the basic principles of dignity and equality" that is focused on misguided outrage in response to the transformation of homogenous societies into multicultural unions. What is pervasive about Trumpism and right-wing populism in general, according to Roth, is how it tends to mythologize the past and veers towards glorifying "times of perceived national ethnic purity." Even if neoliberalism is flawed, Roth claims that it still doesn't lead to the same "majoritarian vision" and subjugation of its opponents like populism. Roth further argues, that because values and human rights are fragile, rather than overthrow democratic governments and international institutions which safeguard vulnerable

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<sup>240</sup> Oliver, J. Eric, and Wendy M. Rahn. "Rise of the Trumpenvolk: Populism in the 2016 Election." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 667, no. 1 (2016): 189-206.

minorities, society needs to be hyper-vigilant, “lest the fears of [populism] sweep away the wisdom that built democratic rule.”<sup>241</sup>

Diverging from the economic thesis, Inglehart and Norris have described populism as a movement driven by insecurity, whereby xenophobia becomes realistic and they argue that populism is tied more specifically to cultural issues, rather than economics. The populist vote, according to Inglehart and Norris, is a reaction to enhanced anxiety over cultural shifts and the influx of foreigners who are seen to be causing a deterioration of cultural norms. In their research, they concluded that economic factors were weak predictors of support for Trump and populist parties in general, whereas, anti-immigrant attitudes tested strongly with support for populism. According to their data, economic issues declined in prominence beginning in 1983 when there was a shift towards non-economic issues, mainly cultural and social and polarization became more value-based and less economically class-based.<sup>242</sup> Still though, Inglehart and Norris acknowledge the real decline in income, job security, and growing income inequality as immigrants and refugees continued to enter, unabated, into what’s classified as “high-income countries.” And when combined with the facts that in 2011, during the distress of the Great Recession, the top one percent controlled 40-percent of the nation’s wealth; in 2012, the income gap between the one percent and the remaining 99-percent had grown to its widest level since the 1920’s; and from 1991 to 2014, incomes across all educational spectrums not affiliated with the one percent, either stagnated or declined, a compelling case for economic anxiety remained. As a result, Inglehart and Norris

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<sup>241</sup> Roth, “The dangerous rise of populism: Global attacks on human rights values.”

<sup>242</sup> Inglehart, Ronald, and Pippa Norris. “Trump and the Xenophobic Populist Parties: The Silent Revolution in Reverse.” *forthcoming in Perspectives on Politics, June* (2017).

admitted this decline and equality gap does bear some of the responsibility for the increase in the popularity of populist parties since the 1970's.<sup>243</sup>

Others, such as Gidron and Hall, promote the idea that economics and social issues are interrelated; that populist attitudes and support are actually the result of an “intersection between economic circumstances and cultural frameworks.” Gidron and Hall suggest that certain frameworks, such as ones based on the celebration of diversity, which have become more prominent and emphasized in Western democracies since the 1970's, has resulted in the raising of status anxiety for those in precarious economic circumstances. They argue that feelings of being “economically-underprivileged” and issues of decline regionally, rather than nationally, cause some voters to feel culturally distant and spatially segmented and this is what spurs both cultural and racial resentment. Using European democracies as a framework, which closely mimic the United States, especially given the nature of Brexit, Marine Le Pen and other populist motivations, Gidron and Hall, noted the increase in support for populist parties since the 1980's. They argue that economic disadvantage is a major force and that cultural and social issues follow, mostly because they are attached to the concept of social status.<sup>244</sup> So, when social status, defined by Weber as “a person's position within a hierarchy of social prestige,”<sup>245</sup> declines with regards to their economic position, what occurs is an enhanced attachment to issues of identity, increasing ethno-nationalist and anti-immigrant sentiment and leads to voting behavior that seeks out economic preservation. A reason for this outcome, according to Gidron and Hall, is because social status is closely related to self-esteem and national identity and as they decline, the inevitable reaction is to

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Gidron, Noam, and Peter A. Hall. “The politics of social status: economic and cultural roots of the populist right.” *The British journal of sociology* 68, no. S1 (2017).

<sup>245</sup> Weber, Max. *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology*. Vol. 1. Univ of California Press, 1978.

resort to emotions and permutations of hostility towards anything perceived as a threat. Like the issue of economic anxiety, this decline doesn't have to be based on objective facts, but can be aroused through subjective attitudes and perceptions. Additionally, in data analysis run by Gidron and Hall, they found a direct correlation between "subjective social status and support for populist parties." This perception also leads to greater resentments towards out-groups, especially among men without a college education, which was a firmly entrenched Trump voting bloc. As a result, according to Gidron and Hall, there is an interactive relationship between economics and culture, but it is negative economic developments which set in motion the cultural developments and cultural mechanisms that intensify the effects.<sup>246</sup> Aydın-Düzgit and Keyman make a similar argument, suggesting that economic anxieties and cultural, or value-based fears in their assessment, are intertwined and "cut across economic classes," especially as it concerns support for Trumpism.<sup>247</sup> Furthermore, according to Samuel Huntington, part of what's occurred with Trumpism and preceding populist revolts, is that American elites have become "dangerously out of touch with the American public when it comes to issues of patriotism, foreign policy, and national identity." The role national identity plays in populist movements cannot be understated, as the chasm between the elite and the public, regarding issues of "language, culture, association, and religion" have helped produce the current fulcrum in American politics that is suddenly, and decidedly, leaning in the direction of MAP.<sup>248</sup>

More than anything, what Trumpism represents is the end of an interregnum, or the transitional period that saw a "variety of morbid symptoms appear" as the ruling class lost

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<sup>246</sup> Gidron and Hall, "The politics of social status: economic and cultural roots of the populist right."

<sup>247</sup> Aydın-Düzgit, Senem, and E. Fuat Keyman. "The Trump Presidency and the Rise of Populism in the Global Context." *Policy Brief. Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center* (2017).

<sup>248</sup> Huntington, Samuel P. *Who are we?: The challenges to America's national identity*. Simon and Schuster, 2004.

the consensus and the people finally became detached from traditional ideologies. Solty suggested that the initial response to compare Trumpism to 19<sup>th</sup> Century populist movements missed the mark, because it is much closer to the ending of an interregnum, reshaping the way politics is viewed, rather than a fleeting gasp of pitchfork politics.<sup>249</sup> It is the finality of the “peasant struggle against neoliberal globalization”<sup>250</sup> ushering in an “epoch of social revolution”<sup>251</sup> fronted by the unheard voices that are intent on undoing the unmitigated damage of austerity politics. It is the victory of emancipatory politics and an act of resistance, especially as it relates to rural Americans, against elitist backed policies of economic degradation.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Solty, “The crisis interregnum: From the new right-wing populism to the Occupy movement,” 97.

<sup>250</sup> Edelman, Marc. *Peasants against globalization: rural social movements in Costa Rica*. Stanford University Press, 1999.

<sup>251</sup> Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *Selected works. In 2 vols.* Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1950.

<sup>252</sup> Scoones, and Edelman, and Borras Jr, and Hall, and Wolford, and White, “Emancipatory rural politics,” 15.

## CHAPTER 5. DATA ANALYSIS

*“I don’t know how you live by the identity-politics sword and don’t die by it.” – Glenn Loury<sup>253</sup>*

This chapter presents the findings of the data analysis for all three case studies focusing on relevant economic and racial anxiety variables and their effect on voter choice using data from ANES studies for the specific election years; 1972, 2010, and 2016. This chapter will report the findings, interpret the results and examine the impact of the findings on the research hypothesis that economic anxiety leads to support of populism and populist voting patterns. The first set of results from the data analysis is represented in Table 1 regarding the 1972 election of Nixon and the Silent Majority.

**Table 1: Effect of Economic and Racial Considerations on Vote for Nixon**

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 <sup>a</sup> Male	.167	.154	1.174	1	.279	1.182
Age	.024	.005	24.250	1	.000	1.024
Strength of PID	.375	.040	89.247	1	.000	1.455
Respondent	.085	.020	17.370	1	.000	1.088
Income						
White	1.643	.372	19.497	1	.000	5.168
Education	.110	.037	9.107	1	.003	1.116
Feeling	-.006	.004	2.296	1	.130	.994
Thermometer for Blacks						
Economic Anxiety	-.204	.069	8.795	1	.003	.815
Constant	-4.321	.612	49.886	1	.000	.013

Note - N=937, Cox & Snell R-square=.241, Nagelkerke R-square=.322.

<sup>253</sup> Packer, “Hillary Clinton and the Populist Revolt.”

Addressing other relevant variables first, the data suggests that in 1972, age and strength of party id were positive and significant, which is expected, suggesting that older voters and stronger republicans were more likely to vote for Nixon since they formed the basis for the Silent Majority coalition. Also, being white is positive and significant, though this again is not surprising, considering the literature suggests populist movements tend towards a white identity. This also aligns with the racial resentment hypothesis. Interestingly, and somewhat in contradistinction to the economic anxiety hypothesis, income and education are also both positive and significant, suggesting that wealthier and better-educated respondents were more likely to vote for Nixon. This may hint at the fact that economic factors were not working in the same way in 1972 as they are in later elections.

However, it is a mistake to regard economic position as the end-all, be-all indicator of economic anxiety, since you don't necessarily need to be poor to worry about your financial situation. So, just because Nixon voters were wealthier, it does not disqualify them from suffering economic anxiety caused by Civil Rights policies and increased competition for jobs, wages and resources. With that said, economic anxiety measured as significant at .003, but was also negative at -.204, suggesting that those who were most economically anxious were less likely to vote for Nixon. One way to interpret this is to acknowledge that the ANES used different economic measures in 1972, which makes a complete comparison to the Tea Party and Trumpism problematic. It is also possible that in 1972, the concept of economic anxiety was not as well explored or researched in terms of statistical data. However, the literature does suggest the existence of economic anxiety and how it affects people in ways not connected to their own financial circumstances. This may also be an indication that MAP,

in its current Trumpian form developed after 1972, does align with the overall theory that 1972 marked the starting point of a political shift that would follow.

Furthermore, the analysis for the feeling thermometer for blacks was negative  $-.006$  and not quite significant at  $.130$ , which suggests that whatever role racial issues may have played, it is difficult to express one way or another. Part of the problem is the lack of adequate measures in the dataset, and therefore, the results do not make it possible to conclude decisively whether racial measures predicted voting for Nixon. This is not to suggest they did not, just that according to the available data in the 1972 ANES survey, I am not able to suggest otherwise. It's also possible, that perhaps other variables were at play, such as the Vietnam War, communism, or the expansion of the welfare state, which were not tested. Also, as the demarcation point, the data for 1972 doesn't appear to support either the economic anxiety or racial resentment theory, but the hypothesis doesn't necessarily require it, since it is the beginning of the paradigm shift towards economic anxiety being necessary for populism, though it does suggest that MAP starts at a later point. Understanding this, the results for the Tea Party and Trumpism analysis should recognize and express this shift and this is exactly what's occurred.

My analysis of the ANES Tea Party study shows that economic anxiety predicts support for the Tea Party, however, the data also indicated that racial resentment did as well.

**Table 2: Effects Economic and Racial Considerations on Tea Party Support**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	2.853	.418		6.817	.000
Economic Anxiety	.264	.069	.139	3.842	.000
Racial Resentment	.123	.043	.094	2.830	.005
Respondent Age	-.004	.003	-.037	-1.201	.230
Strength of Party ID	.400	.031	.487	13.071	.000
Household Income	-.028	.014	-.069	-1.958	.051
Respondent Education	-.122	.031	-.138	-3.867	.000
white	-.260	.132	-.064	-1.965	.050
male	.023	.107	.007	.218	.827

Note - N=649, R-square=.397.

The results in Table 2 show that mean economic anxiety has a positive coefficient, which suggests that it has a positive relationship with support for the Tea Party. In other words, respondents that scored higher in economic anxiety showed stronger support for the Tea Party. Moreover, when you look at the last column, which shows the significance of the model, it's at .000, which means that the coefficient for economic anxiety is significant. Therefore, the results for economic anxiety support the hypothesis.

The other control variables also align with the theory of MAP, such as income, which is negative and significant, suggesting that those who make less money are more likely to support the Tea Party, and the same is true of those with less education. Both conditions are representative of populist supporters and indicative of people most likely to suffer from economic anxiety.

However, the variable concerning racial resentment, also had a positive coefficient of .123, and was also significant at  $p < .005$ . This suggests that, along with economic anxiety,

racial resentment also played a role in whether respondents support the Tea Party. With that said, the variable for White is negative and significant. Because racial resentment is in the model, the “white” coefficient provides some evidence that whites who are low in racial resentment and economic anxiety, may be less inclined to support the Tea Party. Essentially, both hypotheses are proven true, however, it begs the questions: does economic anxiety cause racial resentment or is the reverse true?

Finally, the last case study tested economic anxiety as it applied to Trumpism.

**Table 3: Effects of Economic and Racial Considerations on Vote for Trump**

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 <sup>a</sup> Male	.196	.131	2.251	1	.134	1.217
Age	.013	.003	14.405	1	.000	1.013
Strength of Party ID	.875	.038	520.508	1	.000	2.398
Respondent Education	.000	.010	.000	1	.993	1.000
Income	-.014	.007	3.722	1	.054	.986
White	.199	.068	8.628	1	.003	1.220
Racial resentment	.860	.074	133.779	1	.000	2.362
Economic Anxiety	.777	.096	65.042	1	.000	2.175
Populism	.338	.100	11.378	1	.001	1.402
Constant	-10.801	.575	352.769	1	.000	.000

Note - N=2811, Pseudo-R-square=.739.

The results show that age is positive and significant, meaning that older respondents were more likely to have voted for Trump. Strength of Party ID is also positive and significant, meaning that those identifying as strong Republicans were more likely to have voted for Trump. In terms of the income variable, it is negative and almost significant at  $p < .054$  with  $p < .05$  acting as the cutoff. This implies that those with lower incomes were more likely to have voted for Trump, which aligns with the economic anxiety hypothesis.

However, the variables of real interest are racial resentment and economic anxiety. As noted in Chapter 3, racial resentment is the same set of questions as from 2011 while economic anxiety comprised the same two questions as the measure in 2011, but it also included a third question, which asked whether the current economy is good or bad. Similar to the Tea Party results, economic anxiety is positive and significant, but so is racial resentment. Again, this suggests that both economic and racial considerations play a role. In addition, the populism variable discussed in Chapter 3, measured on a 1-5 scale where 5 corresponds to the highest levels of support of populism and 1 the least, showed that the coefficient is positive and significant. This implies that, even when racism and economic anxiety are taken into account, attitudes about populism in general, played a role in the 2016 election, which is exactly what the idea of MAP would expect. So, the results, are generally supportive of the hypothesis of economic anxiety being necessary for populist support, but how to rectify the data also supporting the alternative theory of racial resentment? I will address this here, rather than in the conclusion, mostly using the Trumpism case study to answer the question because I believe the argument is applicable to all the case studies, especially the more modern Tea Party. Though, sources in the Silent Majority section do address the issue in passing.

In addressing the issue of both hypotheses being supported by the data, it becomes important to determine what issue causes the other and I argue that economic anxiety causes increased racial resentment, so it is not surprising that the results showed a positive and significant relationship between both variables. Some of this has been addressed in previous chapters, in the literature review, however, it is important to revisit this again because it is

important to the research and the hypothesis. It's also a topic for a future project, but for now, a brief interpretation of this finding.

First, it is vital to understand what topics were of most importance to the voters in 2016 and according to the Pew Research Center in a survey conducted in July 2016, it found that the economy was “very important” to 84-percent of voters. The elements of racial resentment, those being immigration and treatment of racial minorities, ranked fifth and tenth, respectively. In terms of Trump voters only, the economy also ranked first, with 90-percent responding it was very important to their eventual voting choice, whereas neither racial resentment variable rose above 80-percent. In discussing how important immigration was to voters, according to Pew, in 2008 and 2016, when economic anxiety was heightened, the issue was very important to a majority of Americans, 54-percent and 70-percent, respectively.<sup>254</sup> However, according to Pew survey conducted in April 2012, which compared issues across elections dating back to 2004. Using the issue of the economy for economic anxiety and attitudes towards immigration as a stand-in for racial resentment, according to the survey, there is a correlation between rising importance voters place on the economy and immigration. From 2008 to 2010, the issue of the economy rose from 88-percent to 90-percent, so did the importance of immigration, 54 and 58-percent, respectively. However, in 2012, when the importance of the economy dropped to 86-percent, immigration also declined in importance, to 42-percent.<sup>255</sup> And, as was mentioned previously, in 2016, both issues arose again in tandem. This suggests that despite the results of racial resentment in the data, the

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<sup>254</sup> Pew Research Center, July, 2016, “2016 Campaign: Strong Interest, Widespread Dissatisfaction,” <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/07/07-07-16-Voter-attitudes-release.pdf>

<sup>255</sup> Pew Research Center, April, 2010, “Social Issues Rank as Lowest Priorities,” <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/legacy-pdf/4-17-12%20Political%20Release%20.pdf>

driving force behind not only Trump, but also the Tea Party, was linked to economics, not racial attitudes.

Furthermore, there is evidence that suggests economic anxiety can cause racial resentment, which does not negate the hypothesis that economic anxiety is necessary for support of populism, but only suggests that economic anxiety is a far-reaching form of social oppression. In support of this approach, Rory McVeigh, in studying white supremacist movements, that economic grievances led to greater racist sentiment. Additionally, McVeigh wrote of white supremacist logic, that:

“Promotion of free trade and a global economy are viewed as part of a plot that benefits the elite, as well as other races throughout the world, while reducing the standard of living for ordinary white Americans.”<sup>256</sup>

This is not to suggest that white supremacists are inherently Trump supporters or supporters of populism, but only to illustrate how economic anxiety leads to changes in perceptions with regards to numerous issues. Furthermore, Claudia Goldin, noted how people’s perceptions of immigration, a component of racial resentment, were affected by economic circumstances and that this has historical roots in American society. In research focused on the influx of immigrants between the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, Goldin found that almost every call for literacy tests, which were openly used as a method to curtail the flow immigration, were almost always preceded by economic downturns.<sup>257</sup> Recently, Peter Burns and James Gimpel, in their analysis of American polls from the 1990’s, concluded that, economic hardship activates prejudices that are “latent,” which animates preexisting

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<sup>256</sup> McVeigh, Rory. "Structured ignorance and organized racism in the United States." *Social Forces* 82, no. 3 (2004): 895-936.

<sup>257</sup> Goldin, Claudia. "The political economy of immigration restriction in the United States, 1890 to 1921." In *The regulated economy: A historical approach to political economy*, pp. 223-258. University of Chicago Press, 1994.

views. Using ANES data from 1992 and 1996, Burns and Gimpel found that respondents who were “pessimistic” about their personal economic situation in 1992, were more likely to harbor “desultory stereotypes” and their prejudices were rooted in economic fears. Similar results were found in the 1996 data, but racial resentment was directed towards Hispanics, rather than blacks for those holding pessimistic views about their economic circumstances. This could be a direct result of the passage of NAFTA in 1994, as Hispanics become direct economic competitors. So, once again, racial resentment is a byproduct of economic anxiety induced by economic competition over jobs, wages and finite resources.<sup>258</sup>

Finally, Jeff Guo analyzed the ANES 2016 pilot study which included questions about preferences in the presidential primary, stereotyping, the economy, discrimination, race and racial consciousness. According to Guo, the study found a high correlation between negative views on the economy and racial resentment. Furthermore, Guo combined the different questions about racial resentment and created an index centered on the sentiments of the average American. The results indicated that attitudes of economic anxiety increase racial resentment because people who believed that the economy was doing “much better” had below-average levels of racial resentment, while people who believed the economy was doing “much worse,” were more likely to be racially resentful.<sup>259</sup>

What is important to note, is that racial resentment is not the same thing as racism, because racial resentment is often linked primarily to policy attitudes, whereas racism is primarily concerned with issues of biological inferiority. As such, harboring racial resentment as a result of policy preferences, does not necessarily imply a supporter of

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<sup>258</sup> Burns, Peter, and James G. Gimpel. "Economic insecurity, prejudicial stereotypes, and public opinion on immigration policy." *Political science quarterly* 115, no. 2 (2000): 201-225.

<sup>259</sup> Guo, Jeff. "Stop Blaming Racism for Donald Trump's Rise." *The Washington Post*. August 19, 2016. Accessed April 10, 2018. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/08/19/stop-blaming-racism-for-donald-trumps-rise/?utm\\_term=.197ecc5760c9](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/08/19/stop-blaming-racism-for-donald-trumps-rise/?utm_term=.197ecc5760c9).

populism is a racist, only that they harbor prejudices at perceived economic slights and disadvantage.

## CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

*“The only important thing is the unification of the people – because the other people don’t mean anything.”* – Donald Trump<sup>260</sup>

At its core, populism is a disenfranchised rebellion against financial and governing oligarchs, mobilized in the pursuit of hope and equality. In its efforts, it divides society in competing camps and engages in positional warfare as it promotes a real, unified people. As such, it acts as a sort of emancipation of the people, freeing them to express grievances, antagonisms and any number of anti-establishment sentiments without fear of immediate reprisals as the protection of the populist movement insulates and protects them. Populism isn’t necessarily anti-democracy, but it is a political regime within democratic institutions that allows for the construction of new political frontiers from which to view and assess the crisis, as well as invite political interventions and create political tensions and resistance towards globalization and oligarchization. It’s meant as a solution to ameliorate the crisis, not as an incendiary device enflame it. It is also a reflection that current leaders are out of ideas, simply regurgitating stale scripts and political gestures. Their motivations have become transparent and discernible, while their responses have turned evasive and unconcerned with the concentration of wealth and enhanced levels of inequality. Unfairness has become symbolic. Elite condemnation has become inescapable. And the people have become delegitimized as a political force. Populism is not the enemy, it is the protagonist for change and while it can be stated that populist movements act as an annoyance, briefly dispensing of political norms before receding, dying a slow death, populism as a political ideology never

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<sup>260</sup> Müller, Jan-Werner. “Donald Trump’s Use of the Term ‘the People’ Is a Warning Sign | Jan-Werner Muller.” The Guardian. January 24, 2017. Accessed April 10, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/24/donald-trumps-warning-sign-populism-authoritarianism-inauguration>.

ceases to exist in some form or capacity. So, it doesn't suffer a slow death as much as it falls into a political coma until it's called upon again to expose the political elite, as it has been numerous times since the Silent Majority.

As the historical research and data analysis showed, these instances of populist rebellion occur in times of economic crisis or recession when economic anxiety is heightened. While the data confirmed this in two of the three cases, with the 1972 Silent Majority/Nixon case study the outlier, it does not necessarily cause the hypothesis to be rejected. The 1972 case study was only meant to serve as a foundational, starting point. Ground zero so to speak in the formation of MAP. What is significant, is that the second two cases, the Tea Party and Trumpism, showed a clear correlation between economic anxiety and populism. That being said, a noticeable drawback of the research is the closeness between and recency of the Tea Party and Trumpism, and the nearly four-decade gap between those cases and the Silent Majority. As a result, it is almost necessary to explore populist movements in the intervening decades, regardless of how small. It might also be necessary to establish a different point of demarcation on which to pinpoint the formation of MAP in future research, given how economic anxiety did not lead to a vote for Nixon. The Silent Majority certainly played its part in providing an electoral framework from which future populist movements could work from, but in future iterations, I would move the MAP demarcation point closer to the 1980's and test similar economic and racial variables using different case studies. But, perhaps the demarcation point is appropriate, but the available data was deficient and the 1972 election requires statistical analysis of a different set of data that asks questions more pertinent to the function of economic anxiety as it's understood today.

In responding to the racial resentment that was present in the data results, as argued in Chapter 5, it's not surprising. In fact, given the established and historical link between economic anxiety and racial resentment, it could've been surprising not to find a correlation between racial resentment and populism. I have argued, throughout this paper, that economic anxiety leads not just to populism, but resentful attitudes towards minorities because of increased competition over jobs, wages, economic status and financial security. This is a logical outcome of increased competition, so the correlation between racial resentment and populism makes perfect sense, but it's still an inherent function of economic anxiety and without said anxiety, the resentment is not as powerful or impactful on election results. In future research, it might be beneficial to find data sources that contain more specific questions with regards to racial resentment so less inference needs to be made. Additionally, running statistical analysis on levels of economic anxiety and racial resentment over the course of several elections would give a better understanding of whether there is a correlation between them. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this research, the hypothesis was confirmed in two of the three cases, suggesting a clear relationship between economic anxiety and populist uprisings.

Beyond further research, one thing that needs to occur, whether or not Trumpism is the culmination of populism with long-term sustainability or not, is an honest and open dialogue with populist supporters because populism does not arise from nothing. Like all movements, it needs a catalyst and oftentimes, populism is symptomatic of a breakdown in representative democracy and other dysfunctions involved with democratic systems. As the research indicated, populism is not borne out of simple prejudice. After all, minorities have been an active part in American society for most of its existence, and yet, populist

movements have not. It's also difficult to locate instances of populist incursions during times of economic prosperity. This suggests, as does the data for the Tea Party and Trumpism cases, the most relevant for the thesis, that in fact, economic crisis and anxiety play a far larger role than any other issue in the cause of populism. And without an honest conversation about what led to the crisis or what is causing the anxiety, real problems are overlooked and people are dismissed from the political landscape and conversation and this is a systemic political problem democracies can ill-afford. The neoliberal hegemony, like all hegemonies throughout history, is not infinite and while today, the refusal to address the economic problems of inequality and crisis might lead to a very visceral, albeit possibly fleeting populist reaction, in the future, the response could be something much worse.

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