



2024

Populism: A Comparative Study of the Rise of the Alt-Right in Germany and the United States

Kate O. Tobin
Butler University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/bjur>

Recommended Citation

Tobin, Kate O. (2024) "Populism: A Comparative Study of the Rise of the Alt-Right in Germany and the United States," *Butler Journal of Undergraduate Research*: Vol. 10 , Article 5.
Retrieved from: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/bjur/vol10/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Scholarship at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Butler Journal of Undergraduate Research by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

POPULISM: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE RISE OF THE ALT-RIGHT IN GERMANY AND THE UNITED STATES

KATE O. TOBIN, BUTLER UNIVERSITY
MENTOR: MELISSA ETZLER

Abstract

The far-right extremist movements in Germany and the United States have gained attention and proved concerning, manifesting in the forms of terrorism, nationalism, and xenophobia. The radical right often utilizes populism to undermine liberal institutions, with a proneness to discrimination and violence. Right-wing populism in Germany has been a movement founded on fear, which has expanded to include governmental and political institutions. In the United States, populists often criticize the political elite for catering to the needs of minorities. The influence of the economic crisis on the lower-income, blue-collar areas of the country has been impactful enough to allow for populist rhetoric to gain a foothold in America. Populism is successful only if accompanied by effective propaganda and rhetoric tactics. In Germany, far-right populist parties focus on the political elites' disrespect for German nationalism. In the United States, Donald Trump was able to push rhetoric through an unconventional campaign and build a following that will continue to grow quietly, despite the ending of his term of presidency, through hateful ideologies that portend a cataclysmic event. This event may be necessary for far-right wing extremism to be collectively rejected from American society with as much enthusiasm as seen with the rejection of Nazism following WWII and the Holocaust.

Leading up to and during Donald Trump's time in office, and thereafter, comparisons between Trump and Adolf Hitler have become commonplace in American political discourse, used to characterize Trump as a leader. Various media platforms and individuals of influence have publicly commented on the likeness. *Saturday Night Live* has incorporated the comparison into its skits, as have other late-night comedians. Hosts of *The View* also noted concerning parallels leading up to the general election. Glenn Beck, a previous host of Fox News, made the observation while appearing on ABC's *This Week* segment (Friedman, 2016). This statement has been used to criticize Trump's presidency and claim that the ideologies he promoted during his tenure are fascist in nature. Although many may agree that Trump has become a right-wing extremist enabler, the notion that Trump is comparable to Hitler runs the risk of being based solely on the assumption that these two leaders align because they

both belong to far-right groups. This general claim frequently does not derive from an actual comparative analysis of what was portrayed by their campaigns, leadership, and rhetoric. This is not to say that there are not similarities. There are numerous disturbing ways in which Trump has emulated elements of Hitler's campaigns and propaganda. Additionally, there are similarities in how the ideologies of their parties have manifested, as well as a consistent issue of violence and hatred present within their agendas and their supporters. This paper aims to perform a more detailed analysis of the two leaders, taking into consideration the political and economic climates during their candidacies, their end goals, the foundations of their campaigns, and, most prominently, how populism and its relation to nationalism played a role in their propaganda and rhetorical tactics. There are contrasts in their leadership styles that are difficult to acknowledge without a clear understanding of populism. The propaganda and rhetoric that have been employed require a deeper look for accurate analysis, comparison, and contrast of the two leaders. These tools also help us compare the modern far-right wing movements seen in both Germany and the United States and speculate what this may mean going forward.

This paper has its genesis in a project that I began in 2019 on Nazi propaganda and the rhetoric that was able to convince an entire population to turn against its European neighbors. I could not have imagined that, just a few years later, the political tide would turn in such a way that it would bring these ideas back to the forefront of my mind, as well as society's. Scapegoating, racism, "othering"—these are terms with which the public is confronted almost daily. This paper seeks to further explore the ideology of populism and its overlap with nationalism, using this analysis to compare the leadership styles of Donald Trump and Adolf Hitler, as well as populism's influence in American and German politics today. This will lead to the conclusion involving a more detailed analysis of the existence of the alt-right in the United States today, and how we ultimately may witness a violent, cataclysmic ending to this extremist movement.

The first section of this paper will include a literature review on the ideology of populism, including descriptive characteristics that can aid in its recognition. These characteristics include the populist figure as the "voice of the people," anti-elitist beliefs, scientific skepticism, friend-enemy distinctions, protectionism, and scapegoating. This portion of my work will also seek to compare populism and nationalism, including where they overlap and where they differ. From there, I look at Hitler as a nationalist leader who at times explored populist propaganda tactics. This section will also include political developments since WWII that have contributed to populism's rise in Germany in more recent decades. This portion of my work will end with an analysis of today's right-wing Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party, including the group's overlap with populism and the group's effective use of rhetoric. I then highlight some of the instances when populism has been present in American politics throughout history and leading up to the 2016 presidential election. An

examination of Donald Trump as a populist follows, including a more in-depth exploration into his scapegoating and ostracizing of certain identifiable groups. Finally, I argue that Hitler, despite at times implementing populist rhetorical devices, focused on a more nationalist appeal. Trump, however, can be categorized as a populist who harbors an appeal to nationalist sympathizers. It is the dissonance between Trump's intentions and his base's underlying anger that will provide the foundation for an explosion of extremism.

My hope for this paper is that its readers will be able to compare Hitler and Trump more accurately, acknowledging similarities found in their propaganda and rhetoric while also being aware of the men's ideological differences. I aim for this work to put this common comparison in perspective and to leave readers more educated on the similarities. In addition, this work should enlighten individuals on the power of populism in the political landscape today, and my breakdown of the ideology will, I hope, allow for readers to recognize when populism is present in a campaign. This is not to say that populism is bad but rather is to encourage a more generally educated audience to realize how much of an influence populism can have in politics. I am also optimistic that my analysis of rhetoric in relation to campaigns and movements will provide a deeper level of insight into the power of propaganda.

The Ideology of Populism

Before further exploring the existence of populist campaigns in both Germany and the United States, it is necessary to understand the ideology of populism. In this section, I will define populism and its descriptive characteristics, at times comparing and contrasting populism with nationalism. I will then analyze historic and modern far-right groups in both Germany and the United States, applying these characteristics to the strategies of extremist groups in both countries, then analyzing how rhetoric can contribute to successful populist campaigns. In his book *What Is Populism?* (2016), Jan-Werner Müller seeks to explain populism's somewhat convoluted existence. He makes the important observation that there is no single "theory of populism" today. Instead, there are general criteria that seek to describe populism.

Leaders of nationalist campaigns serve as symbols and rallying points for the nationalist agenda, focusing more on the culture of a nation and thriving on catchphrases and rhetoric that don't necessarily rely on the presence of a representative. From this perspective, nationalist leaders serve as the "embodiment of the nation," whereas populist leaders identify as the "embodiment of the people." Populism has its roots in popular sovereignty, which is "the contention that the unified will of the people is the supreme authority in a state" (Espejo, 2011, p. 3). Historically, popular sovereignty has allowed marginalized groups to "challenge those in power in the name of a fundamental democratic principle" (Schmidtke, 2023, p. 914).

Today, the way populist politics exercises the notion of popular sovereignty lacks room for the diverse range of viewpoints and people who may exist within that society. Instead, it attempts to identify a singular, united will of the people. Populism often involves a leader who communicates to their supporters that they alone can represent this will. Democratic politics are based in pluralism, which encompasses the “recognition that we need to find fair terms of living together as free, equal, but also irreducibly diverse citizens” (Müller, 2016, p. 8). Populist campaigns will implement antipluralistic rhetoric, which can make way for the warped mindset of the “one authentic people” (p. 9). Populists will then “claim exclusive possession of the people’s political voice; their opponents oppose the people’s voice” (Webber, 2023, p. 855). If the populist figure is the spokesperson for “the people,” then those who oppose the populist figure become the enemies of “the people.” Populism questions the intentions of “pluralistic methods for government decision-making,” as political procedures involving the “expression of diverse points of view” are in direct contradiction with an exclusive will of the people (p. 858). Populists then start to evolve the nationalist-rooted “us vs. them” argument into “moral vs. immoral.”

Oliver Schmidtke states in his article “The ‘Will of the People’: The Populist Challenge to Democracy in the Name of Popular Sovereignty,” that, internally, the will of the people “suggests unity and equality as a promise to its followers,” but externally, it “identifies the enemies against whom decisive action is warranted” (2023, p. 925). By way of repeated rhetorical enforcement, populists will start to ignite a dislike for the perceived enemy, leveraging the nationalist practice of “othering.” In many instances, the “them” in this equation refers to the corrupt, political elite. Populists seek to separate themselves from the corrupt elite who exist above them. Prerna Singh outlines the layers of anti-elitist populism in her publication “Populism, Nationalism, and Nationalist Populism” (2021). The radical right will often combine populism and nationalism to undermine liberal institutions or the cultural elite (Halikiopoulou, 2018). Although both populism and nationalism pose a threat to democracy, the primary difference found between these movements is related to the behavior of the representatives.

Populist leaders will act unorthodox in their methods of speech and rhetoric and push the narrative that they are a representation of “the people.” As opposition parties dismiss populist leaders’ behavior as tasteless, populists can utilize the criticism to their advantage. More recently, with the rise of media platforms as a news source, populist politicians thrive on “criticism from more established candidates and from the media as (it) . . . serves to strengthen their followers’ belief in the populist’s authenticity” (Darling & Gatz, 2019). This criticism contributes to the suspicion of and distrust in professional expertise, science, and education (Webber, 2023, p. 863). By labeling adversarial judgment as typical elitist behavior, populists convince their audience that criticism of their nonconformist, unprofessional behavior reflects how these elites view the people: with judgment and distaste.

The very concept of the educated elite can lead to uneducated populations feeling marginalized and results in a pushback against academics and experts. Members of the academic community start to lack credibility, making it much easier for populist politicians to take advantage of political polarization and build upon a distrust of institutions and science. Scientific skepticism is another characteristic of populist politics, and today's post-truth politics aid in mass-advertising, antiscience messaging. Post-truth politics can be described as a "toxic combination of policy blunders on austerity, war and globalization coupled with a new hybrid media and political system dominated by reality TV, social media, and filter bubbles" (Suiter, 2016, p. 25). As populist politicians embrace a post-truth media world, supporters suffer from a flood of misinformation. Post-truth politics has led to politicians "manipulating popular opinion and discrediting scientific evidence that contradicts their political agendas" (Snodgrass, 2022). Further, using the "us vs. them" narrative, politicians will further emphasize that any ideas that the opposition supports are illegitimate, regardless of their scientific validity.

In addition to naming elites as part of "the people's" opposition group, populist politics typically erect a group they can perceive as "less than." This named "underclass" is not actually based on a financial measure of wealth but rather on ascriptive characteristics, including race, religion, sexuality, and immigration status, among others, employed to provide a sense of superiority among supporters. While society's elites can be hard to distinguish through outward appearance, the characteristics used to identify this group are more readily apparent and provide various identifiable traits toward which supporters can direct their discontent (Singh, 2021, p. 256). This can perpetuate hateful ideologies such as racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia and may lead to political violence aimed toward said groups. According to economist Nils Karlson, "The active promotion of political conflict is central to populism" (2024, p. 10), as its existence aids in vilifying the opposing side.

As previously mentioned, populism thrives on simple answers to nuanced, layered issues within society. People want someone to blame during economic hardship. Scapegoating is quite effective in populist politics, as it builds upon the "us vs. them" argument. Typically, the "them" refers to the elites; however, according to Alexander Douglas (2016), the elites "cannot be their scapegoat, since a defining feature of a scapegoat is its inability to retaliate. And the 'establishment' is very capable of retaliating." So, while populist blame may often be aimed at the elites and the establishment, when it comes to action, populist rhetoric often focuses on and leads to attacks on marginalized groups. In her article "The Politics of Fear," Ruth Wodak states that "all right-wing populist parties instrumentalize some kind of ethnic/religious/linguistic/political minority as a scapegoat for most if not all current woes" (2015, p. 2).

Many populists also take up a strong protectionist stance, which involves the protection of domestic goods, manufacturers, and workers from what is considered “outside” or foreign competition. Politicians who push protectionist views offer up simple solutions to complex economic issues, for example, combining some form of increased public spending with tax cuts (Karlson, 2024, p. 8). Unsustainable economic policy is a byproduct of populist politics’ priority of gaining popularity and emotional resonance among supporters. Often, protectionist and isolationist stances lead to strong anti-immigration rhetoric and policy. Immigration can be viewed by populists and their supporters as the “most intrusive and disruptive (form of globalization) because as a result of it, people are dealing not with objects or abstractions; instead, they come face to-face with other human beings, ones who look, sound and feel different” (Zakaria, 2016, p. 15).

Populism & Nationalism in Germany

The rise of Adolf Hitler and Nazism came at a time when Germany was economically crippled, and experiencing a wounded sense of national pride in the aftermath of World War I. Ideas such as anti-Semitism, expansionism, and Aryan supremacy gained popularity, primarily because of the masterfully effective propaganda techniques employed by Hitler and the Nazi party. In the 1930s, Germany was at its most vulnerable, with widespread suffering as a result of the economic depression, which left about one-third of Germans unemployed (Hall & Ferguson, 2001, p. 132). Further, the damaged national morale in the wake of World War I served as a strategic rallying point for Hitler’s political and military agendas. Hitler also effectively convinced the German public that he would fight for them, metaphorically, by pushing for extreme nationalism, as well as the need for *Lebensraum* (living space), which he argued was paramount if Germany was going to successfully assume its rightful place as the dominant global force. Hitler and the Nazi party were able to profit from the combination of various misfortunes that plagued German society following World War I.

During Hitler’s tenure as Germany’s leader (*Führer*), the most influential component of his campaign was his disturbingly effective propaganda. Hitler shaped public opinion through Nazi propagandists, who “learned how to translate fundamental ideological postulates into a continuous narrative of events, a heavily slanted story of good and evil, easily accessible to mass audiences” (Herf, 2008, p. 17). A major key in Hitler’s dictatorship was his ability to gain control over the press, censoring all information that was released to the German public. The NSDAP, the Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, amassed roughly 5.3 million members in 1939 (Herf, 2008, p. 19). Nazi propaganda grew to encompass the press, film, music, and German popular culture. By incorporating simple slogans such as “*Die Juden sind Schuld*” (“The Jews are to blame”), the propaganda made Hitler’s

message clear and simple, reaching both educated and noneducated alike who felt a collective anger following World War I and were desperately seeking a scapegoat.

As World War II continued, Nazi propaganda failed to address the murder of millions of Jews in Nazi concentration camps. Instead, the propaganda aimed to paint the Allied powers and their sympathizers as a “conspiracy of nonequals” who shared a common goal of achieving international Jewry (Herf, 2008, p. 143). This not only furthered Hitler’s pure Aryan race theory with use of the word “unequal” but also fabricated and exaggerated the Allied powers’ goals to invoke fear in the German population. Hitler’s claim that he was the embodiment of the nation and that Jews were a disease within Germany that must be eradicated is decidedly nationalist in nature. Hitler also used eugenics as a scientific basis for his Nazi propaganda, often citing references from a resolution passed by the International Federation of Eugenic Organizations, which accentuated the importance of eugenics for civilized societies (Kuhl, 2014, p. 27). The Nazis used the science of eugenics to support their ideology of German dominance and superiority in furthering their nationalist cause.

Despite Hitler’s alignment with nationalist ideals, some of his propaganda and rhetorical tactics are populist in nature. The key to Hitler’s verbal propaganda was that he kept his speeches short and impactful, using repetitive phrases. Hitler was able to convince his supporters that the entire world was riddled with corrupt Jews, politicians, and socialists who had all come together in a fight against Germany. He would often refer to the pure Aryan race as *Volk* (the people), to reinforce the notion that they were the true citizens of the German nation and were therefore tasked with fighting for its prosperity, by whatever means necessary. In his speech at the Münchner Löwenbräu in 1928, Hitler said, “The goal of the National Socialist movement is called: People and Fatherland, our slogan is called: Honor, Freedom, and Bread, and the way it is done is called: Fight” (de Saussure & Schulz, 2005, p. 195). This call to action for the freedom of the perceived Fatherland indicated that the issue the country was plagued with was one that affected all Aryans, requiring they take action to save their nation.

When World War II ended and Germany was divided, the Soviets took control of eastern Germany, imposing communist political ideology. The East was pushed so forcibly into communism that a natural pushback of right-wing and Nazi extremism took hold. There still exists an invisible border between the East and the West, even following the fall of the Berlin Wall. In her article “Why Is Eastern Germany So Far Right?” (2018), Anna Sauerbrey refers to East and West Germans as “unequal siblings . . . the strong one loves his smaller and uglier brother and accepts that his deviant behavior comes from trauma, but he still looks down on him.” This approach helps explain some of the apparent extremism that has continued to build in eastern Germany over the decades since Germany’s reunification.

In western Germany, fascist sentiment witnessed increased scrutiny and stigmatization. German identity was restructured to follow a more liberal agenda (Tanca, 2017, p. 21). Anyone who proposed right-wing or populist policies was characterized as putting effort toward continuing the Nazi party, which Germany so desperately wanted to cleanse its hands of following the devastation of WWII. The so-called “political elites” were responsible for the process of denazification that occurred during the 1950s. Denazification came to include a total rejection of nationalism, as nationalism became synonymous with “a denial of responsibility for Germany’s disastrous past” (p. 22). The repeated smothering of nationalism unintentionally served as a stimulant for the rise of a populist movement that categorized the political elite as a group who not only misunderstood but also disrespected what it meant to be German. This inadvertently paved the way for populist leaders to push the necessary rhetoric to achieve support.

Between 1990 and 2000, right-wing violence in Germany was responsible for more than 200 deaths, with multiple murder and attack reports filed into the early 2000s (Biess, 2020, p. 359). In the year 2016, the BBC reported an average of 10 attacks per day on migrants, with 560 people injured in total (BBC, 2017). In addition to xenophobic hate crimes, Germany has seen anti-Semitic crimes, including the murder of two people outside a synagogue by a right-wing extremist in the east in 2019. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, in an interview with Malcolm Brabant, stated that the neo-Nazis in Germany “want . . . an authoritative state that aggressively excludes parts of society. They see themselves as part of a tradition” (Brabant, 2020).

Additionally, there are economic factors that can assist in explaining the rise of populism in Germany. The shift in the labor force seen following WWII due to a high influx of migrants and refugees has been directly correlated with the increase in unemployment among German nationals (Tanca, 2017, p. 12). Populist parties have been able to gain leverage among supporters through antiglobalization rhetoric and policy proposals. Populist movements thrive during economic crises. This can explain why there was an escalation in German populism in the wake of WWII, when the country was economically crippled. In recent decades, the rise of populism in Germany has evolved to encompass nativism. Nativist ideology follows “extreme cultural or economic protection of ‘homogenous’ nationals in their nation states against immigrants and the effects of globalization” (Tanca, 2017, p. 8). Nativism attempts to rally supporters against the elite, linking directly to the rhetoric deployed by influential populist figures. Today, this protection of the homeland from the impact of globalization is, in Germany’s case, known as Euroscepticism, involving the strong opposition to the expansion of the European Union and the power that comes with said expansion (Brack & Startin, 2015, p. 1).

The Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), a far-right wing political party, is an example of a modern form of populism in Germany. The AfD first appeared in 2013 but

grew in prominence in 2017, when it was able to secure 12.6% of the vote, as well as 92 seats in the Bundestag (Gedmin, 2020). The AfD holds strong anti-immigration and antirefugee sentiments. For some time, the party was able to convincingly pass as a moderate group; however, because of an increase in racist nationalism and anti-Semitism, the AfD has shifted into the alt-right category. The party finds its most ample supporters in eastern Germany and includes both the “right-wing extremist fringe and people dissatisfied with the status quo” (Chase & Goldenburg, 2019). The rise of this party is consistent with some of the global trends surrounding populism that have also manifested in the United States. Leaders of the AfD routinely dismiss the mainstream media as complicit with the corrupt left-wing political elite. The AfD overlaps populism and nationalism in its messages, which challenge immigration as an onslaught of foreign agendas that will weaken the nation and its values.

The largest groups in Germany that experience backlash from the AfD are Muslims and immigrants. A popular form of rhetoric for the AfD, as well as other far-right extremist movements, is known as femonationalist rhetoric, in which there is a “distortion of feminist ideas . . . for the stigmatization of migrants, ethnic minorities, and Muslim women through racialized representations of these groups as inferior” (Doerr, 2021, p. 4). For example, a poster released during the AfD’s 2017 campaign showcased two women in bikinis. The message said, “*Burkas? Wir steh’n auf Bikinis*” (“Burkas? We like bikinis.”). This is a blatant criticism of Islamic tradition, posed as an attempt to appear sympathetic to the feminist movement. This rhetoric attempts to use the assumed oppression of Muslim women who wear Burkas as a flaw in Islamic tradition in relation to the modern feminist advertisement of the “empowered woman” who has control over her body (p. 4).

Recently, the AfD’s cochair and spokesperson, Joëg Meuthen, has stepped down from his role, claiming he can no longer support the “clear totalitarian echoes” that the party has come to represent (Deutsche Welle, 2022). Meuthen has spoken out against the extremist tendencies that the AfD has gravitated toward, and he has been met with opposition from various members of the party. He also lists the AfD’s cult-like approach to the COVID-19 pandemic as a driver for his resignation (Deutsche Welle, 2022). The AfD has incorporated Islamophobia into its propaganda, criticizing traditional practices of Islam and mixing in left-wing rhetoric, in this case rhetoric associated with feminism, to appear more sensitive to progressive movements.

In addition to offensive messaging within its propaganda, the AfD has been considered morally responsible for various attacks aimed at synagogues and mosques around the country. Many in opposition to the party feel that, through the widespread propaganda and hateful rhetoric, the AfD has been indirectly inciting violence against these scapegoated groups in society. Although the AfD may not be directing these members of society to commit such massacres and atrocious acts, the group is circulating dangerous propaganda that may mark the group as complicit. In 2019, the

leader of the Free Democratic Party in Germany, Mark Buschmann, reported that an attacker at a local synagogue was hunting down scapegoats, and claimed that any political parties utilizing “scapegoat theories” to further their agendas were partially responsible for these beliefs culminating in violence (Witting, 2019). With the rise of the AfD and a growing fear of immigration in Germany, right-wing acts of violence rose by 50% between 2015 and 2016 (Biess, 2020, p. 359). Politicians in Germany recognize the threat that lies within far-right wing rhetoric and hope that the AfD will work to shift its propaganda so it doesn’t put certain groups in society at high risk of acts of domestic terrorism.

Since the 1970s, right-wing populism in Germany has been a movement founded on fear, which has evolved to include fear of Muslims and migrants, as well as governmental/political institutions. The distinction between right-wing populists and conservatives is that populists fear the political elite. In comparison, conservatives tend to fear the fall of authority at the hands of left-wing groups. The two groups can overlap when it comes to fear of the “other,” usually minority groups. Right-wing populist groups “personalize their objects of fear . . . (with) the potential to turn into hatred and acts of violent exclusion” (Biess, 2020, p. 359). According to *The Economist’s* 2021 election statistics report, the AfD party was able to obtain 83 seats, or 10.3% of the vote. Although this was a lesser share of the vote than in 2017, AfD has a concerning presence in the German parliament that should not be underestimated.

Populism and The United States: A Historical Overview

Populism has existed in American politics since the mid-19th century. The Know Nothing party is one of the earliest recognized nativist/populist political parties in the United States. The party found initial success following the mass Irish immigration in wake of the potato famine (Alsan et al., 2020, p. 8). Led by Thomas Whitney and William Poole, the party embraced both nationalism and religious discrimination (Boissoneault, 2017). One of the Know Nothing’s primary goals was “reducing the immigrant threat to native workers” (Alsan et al., 2020, p. 10). Fears surrounding job stability because of the influx of immigrants and industrialization, as well as anti-Catholic sentiments, contributed to the party’s influence (p. 9). Eventually, the party collapsed because of its inability to take a position on abolition, but the party’s approach to immigration “has been apparent in policies aimed at each new wave of immigrants” (Boissoneault, 2017).

In the late 19th century, the Populist Party was formed. This party was led by Thomas E. Watson and sought to meet the demands of the southern-based Farmers’ Alliance, whose primary belief was that the political economy of the United States served only the rich (Shaw, 2020). The Farmers’ Alliance called for the government to implement inflationary policy, in hopes of increasing the price of cotton (Shaw, 2020). The party sought the support of African Americans in its political campaigns. The

presidential election of 1896 did not prove successful, and eventually, the party collapsed. Thomas Watson, however, returned to politics in the early 20th century and advocated for depriving African Americans of the right to vote in Georgia. This led many African American voters to feel that “the movement offered them little and Populist appeal had more to do with opportunism than friendship” (Shaw, 2020). The fallout from Thomas Watson’s betrayal of the African American voter was influential in populism’s relationship with race.

In the 20th century, Father Charles Coughlin’s radio show became “the voice of the people” in America following the Great Depression (Wang, 2021, p. 3065). Radio was a relatively new form of broadcasting and introduced a new medium with which to spread influence. Father Coughlin’s history as a religious speaker lent itself to his success as a compelling radio host. In the 1930s, he became “a leading anti-Semitic, icon, fascist sympathizer, and isolationism advocate in prewar America” (p. 3086). According to Wang, Coughlin can be considered the first populist media personality in the United States. He had a persuasion rate of 28% among the American public and influenced the formation of pocketed groups of pro-Nazis (p. 3089). Prior to radio, populism had existed primarily as a political ideology. Father Coughlin demonstrated how the adoption of new technology media would forever change the ability of populist politicians to garner support.

Populism has continued to emerge in American politics in more recent decades leading up to the 2016 presidential election and has found strong footing following economic crises. The right-wing Tea Party movement gained popularity following the 2008 financial crisis, and in 2010 had achieved support from almost a quarter of the American public (Minkenberg, 2011, p. 290). The party was majority White and middle-class and promoted antiestablishment messaging. Many members of the movement felt strongly that the political elite fashioned projects “aimed at concentrating in the hands of a ‘small group’ of putative experts ‘an almost complete control over other people’s money, other people’s labor, other people’s lives’” (Rahe, 2011). Some have identified the Tea Party as fostering the prevention of a practical solution to the debt crisis in 2011 (Minkenberg, 2011, p. 283). After the 2011 financial crisis, the left-wing activist movement Occupy Wall Street gained traction, focusing on issues such as the climate crisis, growing wealth disparities, debt, and rising housing and healthcare costs (Levitin, 2021). The group’s motto was “We are the 99 percent,” pointing a finger at the wealthiest 1% and shedding light on the reality of the wealth gap in the United States. In the end, Occupy Wall Street was unable to prevail in the face of poor weather, weariness, and tension among occupiers (Anthony, 2021). Even following these movements, productivity growth was slow, and many Americans felt that “many of the emergency measures adopted in the aftermath of the crisis . . . benefited the well-connected few at the expense of everybody else” (Rohac, 2018). American populism surrounds the “mistrust of major institutions . . . and suspicion of

global elites” (Rohac, 2018). Those who are loyal to populist sentiments in the United States associate the Great Recession with the wrongdoings of the elite.

In the United States, democracy’s strength has become questionable as people continue to distrust government institutions. Additionally, the structural changes seen in the labor market during the early and mid-2010s has resulted in outsourcing of labor to low-cost locations. The ensuing threat to economic stability, as well as the American value placed on individualism and the dignity associated with maintaining a stable job, contribute to populism’s success. Like the institutionalized and enforced embarrassment associated with nationalism in Germany following the war, those in the United States who can’t seem to find themselves in a stable economic position feel humiliated by the entity that is supposed to look after them: the government. This “dignity deficit” is “a potent resource ripe for unscrupulous political candidates to translate into popularized anger” (Rohac, 2018).

The loss of status further exacerbates the gap between the corrupt, political elite and the ordinary people. In the United States, populists often criticize the political elite for catering to the needs of minorities while overlooking their suffering, which provides the resentment of “the other” in American society. In the United States, while immigrants have been at the center of hateful rhetoric, it is African Americans who face the most discrimination as related to the populism movement (Rohac, 2018, para. 15). African Americans still suffer the long-term ramifications of slavery and segregation, as seen in the systematic inequality that exists in economic, social, and health institutions today. Populists “exploit anxieties related to . . . demographic change” (Rohac, 2018, para. 16). By building upon the fears of the people, American populist politicians can easily provide scapegoats for discrimination.

Leading up to Donald Trump’s election, many components, including economic insecurity, terrorism, globalization, and various other influences, promoted the 2016 trends in the American electorate. James McGann, a senior lecturer at the Lauder Institute University of Pennsylvania, names economic, physical, and information insecurity as contributing factors, as well as a loss of national identity and a lack of confidence in government institutions. Globalization plays an important role in the loss of national identity and served as a foundation for Trump’s campaign slogan “Make America Great Again,” with the focus on “America First,” rallying to his side voters who desperately felt the need for a resurgence in American patriotism. These factors, when combined with various other ills and perceived oppression by the American conservative party, “drive populism and politicians who tweet simple solutions to complex problems” (McGann, 2016). Hitler also utilized the plainest of slogans to unify the German people under a simplified, unrealistic ideology.

Both Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders called for pushback against the establishment. Anti-elitism was present in both campaigns; however, Bernie Sanders’s populist agenda had a slightly different underpinning, including the general

questioning and suspicion of the extent to which the current institutions truly served the ordinary American people. Donald Trump, while supporting anti-elitism despite being a member of the elite himself, took the argument a different route by repeatedly reiterating an unconventional candidacy that reflected the people of America, who had been “misunderstood” for far too long. Both candidates employed populism in their campaigns, yet only one succeeded.

Populism: Donald Trump’s Campaign and Presidency

Pauline Jones and Anil Menon of the University of Michigan developed criteria to classify different types of populists (Jones et al., 2019). Jones and Menon use two major criteria to classify these figures. First is the figure’s position in the political landscape as either an insider or an outsider. The second measure follows the individual’s ideological commitment, and whether the individual subscribes to opportunism or true belief. Leading up to Donald Trump’s campaign, he was both a political outsider and an opportunist. According to Jones and Menon’s chart of classifications, Trump is a strategic populist, targeting his rhetoric solely at the masses and failing to align his rhetoric with effective policy. Leading up to the 2016 election, the influence of the economic crisis on the lower-income, blue-collar areas of the country was impactful enough to allow for strategic populist rhetoric to gain a foothold among the population. During his campaign and presidency, Donald Trump consistently used a combination of the arguments that the United States, once special, is now a weak player on the world stage and that this humiliation has been brought about by America’s enemies, including both internal and external figures. Trump would often “arouse a sense of threat and then resolve it by providing an answer in the form of himself” (Rowland, 2021, p. 25). He successfully convinced supporters that he is “representative of the group in both a symbolic and a practical way, able to represent the group at the political level” (Reicher & Haslam, 2017). Trump was able to tap into the collective unconscious surrounding the “us” and falsely reinforced his seat in the room among the “alienated” members of American society.

Trump lives an outwardly rich lifestyle, one that the masses associate with the attainment of the American dream. Donald Trump is nowhere near what society would consider the struggling working-class American; therefore, to appear more legitimate as the voice of the common people, Trump addressed his wealth in a way that proved advantageous, arguing that he “has been so successful and become so rich that he cannot be bought” (Reicher & Haslam, 2017). This self-characterization of his wealth juxtaposes the various other elites who are easily corrupted by financial incentives. Trump claimed to “tell it as it is,” presenting himself as a nonconformist in contrast to the existing convoluted political landscape filled with insincere, half promises from the more established candidates. Most of Trump’s charisma came from the fact that he almost always seemed to be unprepared in his speeches, which gave

him an air of approachability (Khazan, 2016). In this way, Trump continued to exercise the argument that he is the embodiment of the “true” American people.

Trump “creates a sort of authoritarian godlike aura” as the one who will “protect all of your rights and all of these huge issues around justice, fairness and freedom of speech” (Khazan, 2016). He curated the “us vs. them” mentality through his speeches, and the message behind “Make America Great Again” is synonymous with the return to a “golden age,” in which the real, moral citizens of the nation triumph. By painting his supporters as the morally righteous members of society, Trump was able to make the claim that everyone else was not just wrong but morally evil. In right-wing populism, insult politics aid in labeling the moral vs. immoral using “norm-breaking language (as a) political strategy” (Winberg, 2017, p. 3). Trump often employed insult politics by using nicknames such as “Crooked Hillary,” “Cheatin’ Obama,” and “Lyn’ Ted” (Relman, 2019). By attacking his opponents aggressively, he was more likely to receive pushback from them. Trump was then able to use their disapproval of him as the unconventional leader as further proof that the political elite are snobby and judgmental. In an interview with Ari Shapiro of NPR, Jennifer Mercieca, an American political rhetoric historian, points out the concern when dehumanizing wordplay is utilized in front of mass audiences. Mercieca states that “the only time you see presidents using the rhetorical strategy... (of) treating people as objects is when they’re using war rhetoric” (Shapiro, 2021).

Much of Trump’s rhetoric played on the fear that his followers have surrounding a variety of issues, including the implementation of a “socialist agenda” by the liberal elite, as well as a loss of a core American identity and values. Trump supporters were convinced that if an opposition group won, they would lose their freedom. Trump exaggerated the reality of the “liberal agenda” to bring fear to his base, so much so that many supporters were convinced that being White, Christian, or male made them oppressed or discriminated against by other groups. Donald Trump also advocated for the protection of American jobs during his campaign, and he enacted protectionist policies during his presidency. As previously mentioned, populism often results in protectionist and isolationist stances. To further contribute to his “Protector of the People” role, Trump claimed that America must “protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs” (Irwin, 2017, p. 45). This rhetoric evolved into the “America First” trade policy, which Trump claimed would lead to prosperity and strength (Irwin 2017, p. 45). By enacting an “America First” trade policy, Trump dispelled the economic concerns of his followers by reinforcing himself as their formidable hero and protector; however, U.S. trade policy expert Douglas Irwin states that the “America First” trade policy would “do nothing to create new manufacturing jobs or narrow the trade deficit,” and instead risks “triggering a global trade war that would prove detrimental to all countries” (2017, p. 45). Further, a study by the U.S.-China Business Council (USCBC) estimates that Trump’s trade policies resulted in a net loss of almost

245,000 American jobs (Pettis, 2021). Note that this outcome is consistent with the aforementioned unsustainable economic policy that often accompanies populist leadership.

Donald Trump also repeatedly made efforts to “delegitimize core democratic institutions” (Savelsberg, 2020). Trump utilized populist rhetoric to stir a strategic distrust among his supporters in the democratic processes of the United States. By expanding the distrust of elites to encompass governmental institutions, he effectively used the already existing “distrust in the political system as a political weapon” (Fried & Harris, 2020, p. 528). Trump routinely referred to the FBI’s search of his Mar-a-Lago home as a “witch hunt.” The use of this rhetoric resulted in death threats and attacks on FBI officials in Cincinnati and Florida (Stone, 2022). As mentioned in my earlier literature review of populism, promoting political conflict is central in populist success. Trump implemented the argument that an illegal voter-fraud scheme involving mailbox robberies, forged ballots, and fraudulent voter signatures by the left was to blame for his loss in the 2020 election (Fried & Harris, 2020, p. 527). Distrust in the political system, paired with the belief that the opposition actively took measures to prevent the votes of conservative voters from being counted, creates an angry base susceptible to even more extreme future populist rhetoric and propaganda.

Donald Trump’s Use of the Scapegoat

A key characteristic of populism is the tendency of the spokesperson to identify a scapegoat. Because of Donald Trump’s routine scapegoating of immigrants, reluctance to condemn White supremacists, and insistence upon calling the coronavirus some variation of “the Chinese virus,” Donald Trump not only left specific groups of society in a dangerous position but has additionally mobilized and paved the path for far-right hate groups that have proven they are ready to commit acts of violence. Trump used the scapegoat theory to further his anti-immigrant rhetoric. This approach attempts to provide someone to blame for the “underserved Americans” who feel cheated out of jobs. By condemning immigrants and other marginalized groups as the foundation of America’s ills, Trump united the extremists looking for the “other” toward which to direct their hatred. Othering, when paired with anger, has the dangerous likelihood of culminating in violence. Within his speeches, Donald Trump used extreme language to convey simple messages, often exaggerating the situation to resonate with the anger his supporters felt. Instead of addressing immigration in a policy-oriented way, Donald Trump, during his State of the Union speech in 2019, claimed that “countless Americans are murdered (year after year) by criminal illegal aliens” (Lach, 2019). This statement is false yet is effective at garnering a strong, emotionally charged response from his supporters. In addition to referring to them as criminals, Donald Trump has called undocumented immigrants “rapists and gang members who pose a direct threat to the welfare of ‘law abiding’

people” (Perea, 2020, p. 1). By using words such as “invasion,” Trump implies that immigrants are an enemy that is infiltrating America, taking American jobs, and “freeloading.” As a result, Hispanic Americans became a targeted group. Anti-immigrant rhetoric aimed at the southern border also appeals to white supremacists’ “prevailing conception of the United States as a country controlled and dominated by whites and their culture” (Perea, 2020, p. 2). The combination of populist anti-immigrant appeal and white nativist beliefs poses a threat to the safety of Hispanic individuals living in the United States. In 2019, the FBI reported a 21% increase in anti-Latino and anti-Hispanic hate crimes (Canizales and Vallejo, 2021, p. 155). One of the most extreme anti-Hispanic hate crimes in recent years took place in 2019, when a white nationalist murdered 22 people at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas. El Paso borders Mexico, and its population is roughly 80% Latino (Canizales and Vallejo, 2021, p. 155). The claims that illegal immigration is a crisis and that Hispanic citizens are rapists and gang members is inaccurate. In contrast, undocumented immigrants are “statistically less likely to commit crimes than native-born Americans” (Perea, 2020, p. 2). Further, immigrants residing in the United States contribute billions in taxes each year and often take “undesirable, low wage jobs” (Perea, 2020, p. 2).

The United States has also seen a rise in hostility toward African Americans in recent years. Trump’s use of the collective “us vs. them” argument, as mentioned in the earlier populism review, results in members of the “us” looking for physical characteristics to associate with the “them.” In the wake of the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin in May of 2020, Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests erupted not only in the United States but around the world. In response to the protests, members of Trump’s base pushed back with misplaced hostility, claiming an anti-protest rhetoric, with the argument that violence and riots should not be tolerated and would “desecrate” the memory of George Floyd. Others took things a step further; in Kenosha, Wisconsin, 17-year-old Kyle Rittenhouse shot and killed two protestors and injured another (Bekiempis & Gabbatt, 2020).

Trump’s use of scapegoating usually accompanied a shortcoming in his own leadership and policy. The effectiveness of division politics proved to work during his campaign, so it only makes sense that he would turn to these tactics during his presidency. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian Americans became the victims of Trump’s “othering.” Common terms used to refer to the virus were “Chinese virus,” “Wuhan virus,” and “Kung Flu” (Porumbescu et al., 2022, p. 2). Trump’s insistence upon using these terms can be considered partially responsible for Asian hate crimes. Between the time the first case of COVID-19 was recorded in the United States and 2021, there were 3,800 anti-Asian hate crimes, as reported by NBC (Yam, 2021). Trump’s public criticism and verbal attacks aimed at China and its government’s response to the pandemic allowed for anger to be “redirected toward ethnic groups viewed as representative of that government” (Porumbescu et al., 2022, p. 2).

Donald Trump also incorporated islamophobia into his scapegoating, using Islamic extremism as a basis for tighter national security. In discussions about Islam, Trump “compared the religion to a ‘malignant cancer’ and tweeted that a fear of Muslims is ‘rational’” (Zurcher, 2017). Utilizing dehumanizing rhetoric in describing the religion of Islam, Trump painted Muslim individuals as “less than human” and therefore not in possession of human emotions or worthy of human sympathy. Additionally, Trump’s call for a Muslim travel ban led to fear among American Muslims, with members of the faith “afraid to wear headscarves . . . to speak Persian in public . . . for fear that they will be targeted as terrorists” (Katirai & Puig, 2017). Similar to other victims of Trump’s scapegoating, Muslim people experienced an increase in hate crimes leading up to and during his presidency. It was reported that, following Trump’s election, between January and March of 2017, there was an average of one anti-Muslim incident every other day (Patel & Levinson-Waldman, 2017).

I propose that there is a slight disconnect between the argument Trump is making and what his followers feel they are supporting, however. Trump is a populist who is acting sympathetic to the nationalist cause. In a way, he is enacting a nationalist-populism rhetoric. Many of his followers are nationalists yet can’t differentiate between nationalism and populism when it comes to Trump’s promises. A significant number of these far-right wing extremists aren’t even aware of the ideology of populism and can’t objectively look at Trump’s rhetoric in a populist light. Instead, supporters are willing to take anything Donald Trump says and turn it into permission to act in what they believe is the nation’s best interest, even if it involves attacking the United States’ fundamental institution of democracy. Whether or not Trump outwardly acknowledges the correlation between his populist rhetoric and the nationalist-motivated violence that increased in America during his presidential term, his rhetoric was partially, if not fully, responsible for various domestic terrorist attacks against scapegoated groups. As previously mentioned regarding violence in Germany with the AfD’s emergence and growing popularity, using scapegoat theories sooner or later results in a sense of duty in supporters of the right-wing extremist movement, who feel a “call to action.”

The major element making Donald Trump’s campaign populist in nature is that many of his claims and arguments are not backed by science. Populism, as explained previously, is an ideology used by candidates who want to appeal foremost “to the people” rather than to any politically or scientifically accurate cause. I therefore argue that the pitfall of populism in terms of legitimacy is its inability to be backed by any scientific evidence. Donald Trump’s campaign was fueled solely by opinions and the backing of his supporters. There was no scientific support for any of Trump’s rhetoric or arguments; therefore, he can only be populist. Trump’s campaign surrounded his popularity as a candidate and fighter for the people, which doesn’t need or warrant factual or scientific support. Nationalist candidates, in contrast, run a different type of campaign—one that doesn’t focus so much on the popularity of the leader as on the

popularity of national pride. There is therefore more room to introduce scientific arguments into a nationalist campaign—for example, Hitler using eugenics as a “scientific” basis for the crimes committed against European Jews. This is what differentiates Donald Trump’s populist rhetoric and propaganda from Hitler’s more nationalist advocacy and is also what differentiates the two as political figures.

Conclusion

All of this then raises the question of whether it is necessary to have a cataclysmic event with extremists at the forefront to result in the rejection of them as a group—and, furthermore, just how cataclysmic would this event have to be? Although I conclude my study with a focus on the United States and the ongoing influence of the alt-right, I have mentioned throughout that the alt-right has continued to grow in popularity, support, and political influence in Germany. Given Germany’s history, it is surprising to see the AfD continuing to gain support. The tensions resulting in the rise of the extreme right in Germany are not an isolated European event. In April of 2022, France saw a presidential election with Marine Le Pen trailing behind Emmanuel Macron by only around a 5% marginal difference. Le Pen is a far-right leader who espouses anti-immigrant and nationalist ideologies. When one considers the possibility of a cataclysmic event, it thus could well occur on a global scale.

An inherent power is found in Trump’s supporters, lying in the fact that many of the members of his base are collectively united through hatred, or anger. This is attributed to an array of reasons, including, as highlighted in this work, the propaganda and rhetoric Trump has employed and his ability to appeal to emotions and to provide seemingly simple solutions to the various complex ills that plague the people who make up his base. This unity is what makes the extremist groups on the right almost impenetrable in their views. One could argue that anger has also been at the base of some of the most effective activist movements by left-leaning parties throughout history, most recently seen with BLM. The outrage following the murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin served as a catalyst for one of the largest antiracist movements since the civil rights era of the 1950s and ’60s.

The major difference between the right and left in the United States is the mere scope of issues that the left encompasses, which makes it difficult for various subgroups to unite on one common goal. There are activists and supporters on the left who support a whole range of issues. This includes those who stand up for LGBTQ+ rights, those who fight back against discrimination whether based on race or gender, climate change activists, and those who support anticapitalist sentiments. The left is made up of many different circles of ideologies, which can sometimes pose a problem when it comes to uniting a base with one common objective. The familiar discontent felt among Trump supporters allows for a coalition that results in loyalty and

admiration, which may be why Trump supporters have appeared more prone to buying into the Trump base through gear including flags, hats, and stickers. On the other side, many left-leaning voters don't feel a significant attachment to Biden, instead claiming he received their vote solely to achieve Trump's removal from office. A poll conducted by Pew found that 56% of Biden supporters voted for him because he was not Trump (Brewster, 2020). The lack of ability for Biden voters to pinpoint specific reasons why they voted for him outside of their distaste for Trump is what shows a slight weakness in the ability of the left to mobilize with one purpose. The BLM protests were a recent example of how impactful such a goal could be. Overall, the left is more dispersed in terms of goals, and this results in a disadvantage when put up against the collective subconscious of the right.

Donald Trump's rhetoric laid the proper groundwork for right-wing extremists in the United States to continue without his leadership in pursuing their ambitions. Trump was effectively able to cast doubt upon any outsiders, on both ends of the spectrum. On the one side, he was able to convince his supporters that the corrupt liberal elite will always look down on them and that any questioning by leftist politicians of members of the right stems from an inherent disrespect. On the other side, Trump gave his followers groups of people to scapegoat and blame for their ills. The populist appeal and rhetoric outlined earlier in this work transcend Donald Trump as a leader and will continue to influence the right-wing extremist movement, with or without him in power.

A combination of factors leads to my conclusive thoughts regarding a cataclysmic event initiated by the right. When Donald Trump was banned from Twitter in 2021, his supporters were outraged. Although Twitter has the right to suspend or ban any of its users if it deems the users' content inappropriate, many felt that this decision was an infringement upon the First Amendment regarding freedom of speech. Despite good intentions by Twitter and a reasonable cause for the permanent suspension of Donald Trump's account, this action may have indirectly fueled the extremist fire. No matter what comments were being silenced, even if they did enable or incite violence, supporters viewed this as a violation of free speech. With their leader's free speech being inhibited, and him unable to exploit his propaganda, many right-wing extremists questioned the legitimacy of democracy, which gave rise to the eerie concept of the "silent majority."

The concept of the silent majority communicates a presence that exists but whose influence has not yet been felt. When Trump supporters claim to be members of the silent majority, the claim is usually accompanied by a threatening undertone. The reality is that this group of people is unlikely to constitute a majority. The notion of the silent majority isn't necessarily literal but rather serves as a force that empowers members of the extremist right. With the backing of the invisible silent majority, regardless of its legitimacy, right-wing extremist members may feel that if

they act in accord with their beliefs, they will have support. This idea is also very menacing in nature because it communicates a larger force than may actually be existent to those who would oppose members of the right. There is something elusive about the whole concept that incites fear in opposition groups. Now, the silent majority may require more serious consideration, considering the Capitol riots, where we witnessed an assault on democracy following the 2020 election. Additionally, the testimony given by former White House aide Cassidy Hutchinson in June of 2022 furthers the notion that Donald Trump's rhetorical tactics are intended to incite violence and that the former president was willing to turn a blind eye while his supporters stormed the Capitol. Furthermore, Donald Trump's indictment in March may lead to unanticipated reignited waves of support for him and could even prove fruitful for him gaining supporter sympathy.

One of the more recent concerning developments that may contribute to a catastrophic outcome is the anger surrounding the 2020 election. The pushback against Biden's legitimacy as the president-elect was introduced in the days and months leading up the election night when Donald Trump voiced strong opposition to mail-in voting. Mail-in voting has always been used in presidential elections and became even more prevalent with the COVID-19 pandemic, as voters did not necessarily feel comfortable flocking to the polls during a period of such high infection numbers. Despite no significant proof of mail-in voting fraud, Donald Trump routinely made false claims surrounding the practice. He spread misinformation such as the notion that counting ballots after election day is evidence of a "rigged system," or that fraudulent unsolicited ballots were being counted (Parks & Karson, 2020). In addition to these statements, Trump continued to instill distrust in the system by alleging that military ballots with Trump's name on them had been discarded in wastebaskets in Pennsylvania. A few hours into the election, there was a sharp increase in blue votes, since mail-in ballots are counted later than in-person ballots and Democrats are more likely than Republicans to vote by mail (Coleman, 2020). As the tide started to, seemingly overnight, turn toward a Biden victory, Donald Trump had already laid the groundwork for delegitimizing any outcome that did not result in his victory.

The reason this is so important in analyzing and predicting what is to come from the extremist right is how it works in conjunction with the various other misfortunes of which Trump supporters feel they are victims. The anger that possesses this group, and the need for a scapegoat, already makes them a threatening force. These are people who feel cheated out of success and who feel ignored by the liberal elite in favor of minorities, despite feeling that they themselves are the real, hardworking backbone of America. This perceived disservice is problematic on its own, and the "silencing" of the leader who stands up for them, the person who sympathizes with them on a national stage and makes them feel heard, fuels the rage that was already present. And finally, the notion of the election being "stolen," which has led to a lack of faith in democracy as an institution and eventually led to the attack

on the Capitol, showcases just how violent a group like this has the potential to become. No matter how horrifying the attack on the Capitol appeared, the silent majority, existing quietly among us with these collective feelings of outrage, has potential to be extremely dangerous for opposition groups and democracy.

Bibliography

- Anthony, A. (2021, September 12). “ ‘We showed it was possible to create a movement from almost nothing’: Occupy Wall Street 10 years on. *The Guardian*.
www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/sep/12/occupy-wall-street-10-years-on
- Alsan, M., Eriksson, K., & Niemesh, G. (2020, November). *Understanding the success of the Know-Nothing party* (Faculty Research Working Paper 20-035). Harvard Kennedy School.
<https://www.hks.harvard.edu/publications/understanding-success-know-nothing-party>
- BBC. (2017, February 26). *Germany hate crime: Nearly 10 attacks a day on migrants in 2016*. BBC News. www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39096833
- Bekiempis, V., & Gabbatt, A. (2020, August 27). Teen charged in killings of BLM protesters considered himself a militia member. *The Guardian*.
www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/aug/26/kyle-rittenhouse-kenosha-murders-blm-protest-militia
- Biess, F. (2020). *German angst: Fear and democracy in the Federal Republic of Germany* (1st ed.). Oxford University Press.
<https://oxforduniversitypressscholarship.com.ezproxy.butler.edu/view/10.1093/oso/9780198714187.001.0001/oso9780198714187-chapter-10>
- Boissoneault, L. (2017, January 26). *How the 19th-century Know Nothing Party reshaped American politics*. Smithsonian Institution.
www.smithsonianmag.com/history/immigrants-conspiracies-and-secret-society-launched-american-nativism-180961915/
- Brabant, M. (2020, November 18). *How right-wing extremists have infiltrated German security forces*. PBS. www.pbs.org/newshour/show/how-right-wing-extremists-have-infiltrated-german-security-forces
- Brack, N., & Startin, N. (2015). Introduction: Euroscepticism, from the margins to the mainstream. *International Political Science Review*, 36(3), 239–249.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512115577231>
- Brewster, J. (2020, August 13). Poll: 56% of Biden voters say they’re voting for him because he’s “not Trump.” *Forbes Magazine*.

- www.forbes.com/sites/jackbrewster/2020/08/13/poll-56-of-biden-voters-say-theyre-voting-for-him-because-hes-not-trump/?sh=9336bc261322
- Canizales, S., & Vallejo, J. A. (2021, June 16). Latinos & racism in the Trump era. *Daedalus*, 150(2), 150–164. www.amacad.org/publication/latinos-racism-trump-era. https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_01852
- Chase, J., & Goldenburg, R. (2019, October 28). *AfD: From anti-EU to anti-immigration*. Deutsche Welle. www.dw.com/en/afd-what-you-need-to-know-about-germanys-far-right-party/a-37208199
- Coleman, J. (2020, September 15). *Democrats more likely than Republicans to mail in ballots early: Poll*. The Hill. <https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/516521-democrats-more-likely-to-mail-in-ballots-early-than-republicans-poll>
- Darling, J., & Gatz, M. (2017, December 22). *Through the lens of populism: The 2016 election*. USC Schaeffer. <https://healthpolicy.usc.edu/evidence-base/lens-populism-2016-election/>
- de Saussure, L., & Schulz, P. (Eds.). (2005). *Manipulation and ideologies in the twentieth century: Discourse, language, mind*. John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/butler/detail.action?docID=622820>
- Deutsche Welle. (2022, January 18). *Germany: AFD co-chair Jörg Meuthen quits party, says it's lurched too far right*. <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-afd-co-chair-j%C3%B6rg-meuthen-quits-party-says-its-lurched-too-far-right/a-60589522>
- Doerr, N. (2021). The visual politics of the Alternative for Germany (AfD): Anti-Islam, ethno-nationalism, and gendered images. *Social Sciences*, 10(1), 20. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10010020>
- Douglas, A. (2016). *The dirty politics of scapegoating—And why victims are always the harmless, easy targets*. The Conversation. theconversation.com/the-dirty-politics-of-scapegoating-and-why-victims-are-always-the-harmless-easy-targets-66963
- Economist. (2021). *German elections 2021*. The Economist. <https://www.economist.com/german-election-2021>
- Espejo, P. O. (2011). *The time of popular sovereignty: Process and the democratic state*. Penn State University Press. <https://doi.org/10.5325/j.ctv14gp3s6>

- Fried, A., & Harris, D. B. (2020). In suspense: Donald Trump's efforts to undermine public trust in democracy. *Society*, 57, 527–533.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-020-00526-y>
- Friedman, G. (2016, March 10). 9 times Donald Trump was compared to Hitler. *The Times of Israel*. www.timesofisrael.com/9-times-donald-trump-was-compared-to-hitler/
- Gedmin, Jeffrey. (2020, January 30). *Right-wing populism in Germany: Muslims and minorities after the 2015 refugee crisis*. Brookings.
www.brookings.edu/research/right-wing-populism-in-germany-muslims-and-minorities-after-the-2015-refugee-crisis/
- Halikiopoulou, D. (2019). Right-wing populism as a nationalist vision of legitimating collective choice: A suppslyside perspective. *The International Spectator*, 54(2), 35–49.
- Hall, T. E., & Ferguson, J. D. (2001). *The Great Depression: An international disaster of perverse economic policies*. University of Michigan Press.
- Herf, J. (2008). *The Jewish enemy: Nazi propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust*. Belknap Press.
- Irwin, D. A. (2017). The false promise of protectionism: Why Trump's trade policy could backfire. *Foreign Affairs*, 96(3), 45–56.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44823730>
- Jones, P., Menon, A., & Pearson, K. (2019, September 1). *Toward a typology of populists*. University of Michigan Institute for Social Research Center for Political Studies. <https://cpsblog.isr.umich.edu/?p=2550>
- Karlson, N. (2024). Populism: defining characteristics. In *Reviving classical liberalism against populism*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-49074-3_2
- Katirai, N., & Puig, S. (2017, February 1). Muslim-Mexican scapegoats in Trump's America: Voices. *USA Today*.
www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2017/02/01/muslim-mexican-scapegoats-trumps-america-column/97309202/
- Khazan, O. (2016, October 13). Trump as a charismatic leader. *The Atlantic*.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2016/10/why-people-fall-for-charismatic-leaders/503906/>

- Kuhl, S. (2014). *Nazi connection: Eugenics, American racism, and German national socialism*. Oxford University Press.
- Lach, E. (2019, February 6). Trump's dangerous scapegoating of immigrants at the state of the union. *The New Yorker*.
<https://www.newyorker.com/news/current/trumps-dangerous-scapegoating-of-immigrants-at-the-state-of-the-union>
- Levitin, M. (2021, September 14). Occupy Wall Street did more than you think. *The Atlantic*. www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/09/how-occupy-wall-street-reshaped-america/620064/
- McGann, J. G. (2016). *Why Donald Trump won the election and does it mean the end to think tanks and policy advice as we know it?* Penn Collection.
https://repository.upenn.edu/ttsp_papers/6
- Minkenbergh, M. (2011). The Tea Party and American populism today: Between protest, patriotism and paranoia. *Magazine for Public Policy Law and Management*, 4(2), 283–296.
- Müller, J.-W. *What is populism?* University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Parks, M., & Karson, K. (2020, October 1). *A step-by-step look at Trump's falsehoods on mail-in voting: Analysis*. ABC News.
<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/step-step-trumps-falsehoods-mail-voting-analysis/story?id=73354979>
- Patel, F., & Levinson-Waldman, R. (2017). *The Islamophobic administration*. Brennan Center for Justice. www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/islamophobic-administration
- Perea, J. (2020). Immigration policy as a defense of white nationhood. *Georgetown Journal of Law and Modern Critical Race Perspectives*, 12(1).
- Pettis, M. (2021, January 28). *How Trump's tariffs really affected the U.S. job market*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
carnegieendowment.org/chinafinancialmarkets/83746
- Porumbescu, G., Moynihan, D., Anastasopoulos J., & Olsen, A. L. (2022). When blame avoidance backfires: Responses to performance framing and outgroup scapegoating during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Governance*, 36(3), 779–803.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12701>

- Rahe, P. A. (2011, February). How to think about the Tea Party. *Commentary Magazine*. www.commentary.org/articles/paul-a-rahe/how-to-think-about-the-tea-party/
- Reicher, S. D., & Haslam, S. A. (2017, September 18). Trump's appeal: What psychology tells us. *Scientific American*. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/trump-s-appeal-what-psychology-tells-us/>
- Relman, E. (2019, June 7). The most disparaging nicknames Trump used for his political enemies and former allies. *Business Insider*. <https://www.businessinsider.com/trumps-most-disparaging-nicknames-of-2018-2018-12#wacky-omarosa-9>
- Rohac, D., Kennedy, L., & Singh, V. (2018, May 10). *Drivers of authoritarian populism in the United States*. Center for American Progress. www.americanprogress.org/article/drivers-authoritarian-populism-united-states/
- Rowland, R. C. (2021). Trump's rhetoric of nationalist populism in 2016 campaign rallies. In *The rhetoric of Donald Trump: Nationalist populism and American democracy* (pp. 25–39). University Press of Kansas. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1rr6dh8.6>
- Sauerbrey, A. (2018, October 4). Why is eastern Germany so far right? *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/04/opinion/why-is-eastern-germany-so-far-right.html>
- Savelsberg, J. J. (2020, October 28). 1930s Germany and 2020 USA: Should we fear the parallels? *MinnPost*. www.minnpost.com/community-voices/2020/10/1930s-germany-and-2020-usa-should-we-fear-the-parallels/
- Schmidtke, O. (2023). The “will of the people”: The populist challenge to democracy in the name of popular sovereignty. *Social & Legal Studies*, 32(6), 911–929. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09646639231153124>
- Shapiro, A. (Host). (2021, January 19). How President Trump's rhetoric has affected U.S. politics [Audio podcast transcript]. In *All things considered*. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/19/958472423/how-president-trumps-rhetoric-has-affected-u-s-politics>

- Shaw, B. C. (n.d.) Populist party. *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. Last modified September 29, 2020. <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/populist-party/>
- Singh, P. (2021). Populism, nationalism, and nationalist populism. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 56, 250–269. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-021-09337-6>
- Snodgrass, L. (2022, January 10). *Academics can't change the world when they're distrusted and discredited*. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/academics-cant-change-the-world-when-theyre-distrusted-and-discredited-77420>
- Stone, P. (2022, September 11). Trump's increasing tirade against FBI and DOJ endangering lives of officials. *The Guardian*. www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/sep/11/trump-mar-a-lago-witch-hunt-fbi-doj-safety
- Suiter, J. (2016). Post-truth politics. *Political Insight*, 7(3), 25–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2041905816680417>
- Tanca, D. (2017). *The role of historical memory: The development of populism in Germany and France* [Master's thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science]. ResearchGate. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.14183.19360>
- Wang, T. (2021). Media, pulpit, and populist persuasion: Evidence from Father Coughlin. *American Economic Review*, 111(9), 3064–3092.
- Webber, J. (2023). Understanding populism. *Social & Legal Studies*, 32(6), 849–876. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09646639231156144>
- Winberg, O. (2017). Insult politics: Donald Trump, right-wing populism, and incendiary language. *European Journal of American Studies*, 12(2). <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.12132>
- Witting, V. (2019, October 18). *Does the AfD bear responsibility for synagogue attack?* Deutsche Welle. <https://www.dw.com/en/german-politicians-slam-right-wing-populist-afd-over-rising-anti-semitism/a-50893368>
- Wodak, R. (2015). *The politics of fear: What right-wing populist discourses mean*. SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446270073>

Yam, K. (2021, March 19). *There were 3,800 anti-Asian racist incidents, mostly against women, in past year*. NBC News. www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/there-were-3-800-anti-asian-racist-incidents-mostly-against-n1261257

Zakaria, F. (2016). Populism on the march. Why the west is in trouble. *Foreign Affairs*, 5(6), 9–15.

Zurcher, A. (2017, February 7). *What Trump team has said about Islam*. BBC News. www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38886496