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Liberal Democracy in an Era of Populism:

An Analysis of the Shifting Cultures of Democracy

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Abstract

Thirty years ago, Francis Fukuyama suggested that we had reached “the End of History,” a phrase indicating that liberal democracy had emerged as the dominant and final form of societal organization. However, many liberal democracies are today deep in crisis. While the issues facing liberal democracies are many, the rise of right-wing populism is present in almost every liberal democratic state across the globe. Typically, populist rhetoric resonates with those who feel as though democracy is a zero-sum game, and as economic inequality has risen to unprecedented levels, perhaps this sentiment is much stronger. To explore this theory, I conduct a comparative case study between two contemporary liberal democratic states that are experiencing adverse trends in economic inequality: The United States and Portugal. How is the success of populism affected by political structures, political cultures, and deteriorating economies? In what ways can these domestic conditions explain why populist sentiments thrive in some places and are relatively weak in others? By analyzing the success of populist leaders in recent presidential elections in each of these states, I aim to illustrate that while certain domestic factors can exacerbate or thwart populist rhetoric, assumptions that democracy is a zero-sum endeavor can be exploited by populists even in states that have previously been considered an exception to right-wing populism.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, the global conversation surrounding the future of liberal democracy has shifted from a discussion of triumph and peace to one of fear and uncertainty. In contrast to the optimistic yet mundane world order Francis Fukuyama predicted in his 1989 article, “The End of History,” liberal democracies have been universally confronted with an erosion of democratic norms, omnipresent failure of democratic institutions and gatekeeping mechanisms, and a widening of ideological divides. It has become evident that democratic breakdown is no longer the product of violent coups, such as the overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973. Rather, the unraveling of liberal democracies is most often caused by a slow assault on democracy from the government itself, such as the subtle erosion of Venezuelan democracy by populist Hugo Chávez. These slow assaults on democracy tend to begin with the delegitimization of the political opposition and a cultivation of mistrust in political elites. Individuals who feel disenfranchised or displaced by the political system are likely to identify with the rhetoric of populist movements, and in many cases the rise of the internet and social media make it easy for a populist to garner a following large enough to achieve significant political influence. Once in power, these actors can slowly dissolve liberal democracy from the inside: ignoring democratic norms, revising or abolishing democratic institutions, and delegitimizing the media.

A multitude of societal challenges further exacerbate the threats to liberal democracy and raise the stakes of democratic decision-making. First, climate change poses an existential threat to democracy and humanity, yet over seventy percent of global carbon emissions are the result of corporations that rely upon the very foundations of economic liberalism in order to thrive. The interests of these multinational corporations, which are the source of the majority of carbon

emissions, are fundamentally at odds with the interests of those who advocate for a radical shift toward a sustainable global infrastructure. Second, citizens in some countries, particularly the United States, have begun to reckon with the fact that virtually all democratic institutions have been founded on systemic racism and exclusion. While some citizens are beginning to come to terms with the historically exclusive and hypocritical nature of democracy, this notion itself has become a point of cultural contention and a point of exploitation for populists. Third, the recent spread of COVID-19 in every democratic nation has exacerbated inequity, cultivated a global anxiety rooted in the constant presence of sickness and death, and pushed national and international economies to a point of collapse. While the consequences of democratic governance always carry immense weight, we have recently entered a period in which the intersection of so many immense issues have raised the stakes even higher.

The array of issues that are currently facing our global community are vast and challenging. Yet, there has been a worldwide decline in the public's faith that democracy can solve them. In the United States, for example, extreme partisan polarization, within which norms of toleration and restraint no longer serve as guardrails, has made finding a collective solution to our systemic issues almost impossible. Climate change, systemic racism, and the COVID-19 crisis have all been presented as partisan issues, so much so that even their existence can become a politically-charged discussion. Media outlets are labelled based on their ideological leaning, and the outlets that lean in the opposite direction from oneself are delegitimized, often dubbed "fake news." When consuming traditional news media and social media, it is easy to trap oneself in an echo chamber, surrounding only by opinions that align with and reinforce one's existing beliefs. In the United States, where partisan divide and gridlock permeate almost all political discussions, skepticism of political processes and political leaders is mainstream. While

skepticism of authority can be healthy in some circumstances, those who have lost faith in democratic processes are increasingly susceptible to populist rhetoric. This is exacerbated by the recent success of authoritarian nations such as China, whose economic advances have prompted many citizens of democratic states to question their allegiance to democracy as the best possible form of societal organization. The prevalence of populism, coupled with a widespread lack of allegiance to democracy and a current global climate of fear, have created a critical crossroads for the future of liberal democracy.

At the crux of this crossroads is the notion that, among the slew of vast challenges faced by democracies across the globe, something else has changed. Democratic nations have been faced with seemingly unsolvable, daunting issues since their inception, so why is this moment different? Why is populism, a phenomenon that has often been present in various democracies at select times, present in democratic nations almost universally? As Yascha Mounk details in *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom is in Danger and How to Save It*, “there are at least three striking constants that characterized democracy since its founding but are no longer true today.”¹ The three factors that separate democracy today from its stable past are growing economic inequality, enduring racial inequity and hierarchy, and the rise of mass communication. Each of these factors, and the ways in which they have evolved in the past few decades, surely have had seismic effects on how we engage with democracy.

The first factor that Mounk argued was once a constant in democracies but is no longer true today regards economic mobility and the ever-widening gap between those at the top and those at the bottom. In much of the twentieth century, conditions of living steadily rose. Yet, in the past few decades, income levels and living standards have fallen flat. The wealthy have

¹ Yascha Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It* (Harvard University Press, 2019), pp. 15.

become exponentially wealthier, but the financial situation of most democratic citizens has remained stagnant. Consequently, a growing number of democratic citizens have begun to regard democracy as a zero-sum game. Many perceive that economic policies which provide aid to those below oneself in the economic hierarchy are at one's own expense.² Take, for example, the anti-refugee sentiments that have thrived in much of western Europe or the rise of "All Lives Matter" language in the United States as a response to Black Lives Matter. A reform in economic policy and a redistribution of wealth, Mounk argues, would alleviate this constant feeling of urgency to protect oneself, and perhaps restore some degree of collectivism and concern for one's neighbor.

Income inequality exacerbates the second factor which has fundamentally changed democracy: diminishing ethnic and racial homogeneity. Most modern states were formed on the basis of some ethnic or religious identity. Yet, after decades of migration and globalization, the racial and ethnic homogeneity of most democracies is waning. Census data predicts that the United States will be a majority-minority country by 2045.³ However, in some states the sentiments surrounding this decline in homogeneity are hostile. More than sixty percent of the public in Greece and over half of Italians believe that growing diversity makes their country a worse place to live.⁴ While it seems ironic that people feel less attached to democracy when it comes to actually enforcing the ideals of equality and civil discourse, democracy and ethnic

² Yascha Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It*, 15.

³William H Frey, "The US Will Become 'Minority White' in 2045, Census Projects." *Brookings*, Brookings Institute, 10 Sept. 2018, www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2018/03/14/the-us-will-become-minority-white-in-2045-census-projects/

⁴ Richard Wike, et al. "Europeans Not Convinced Growing Diversity Is a Good Thing." *Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project*, Pew Research Center, 30 Dec. 2019, www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/07/11/europeans-not-convinced-growing-diversity-is-a-good-thing-divided-on-what-determines-national-identity/.

homogeneity have almost always been inseparable. As nations reckon with their growing diversity, they have also begun to reckon with the historical legacies of imperialism, colonialism, slavery, and systemic racism, particularly the ways in which these legacies have been cemented into democratic institutions. There is widespread tension between those who see a collective reimagining of democratic institutions in order to finally deliver on promises of equity as fundamental to the definition of democracy, and those who find the growing political power of racial minorities a threat to themselves and to their status quo. For some, a reckoning with past sins and hypocrisies may actually lessen their attachment toward democracy as a whole.

The final factor that has fundamentally changed democracy, the rise of mass communication, has created a new democratic culture that is more receptive to populism. Until recently, radio stations, television networks, newspapers, and other forms of mass communication acted as gatekeepers, and were able to easily marginalize extreme views. For the most part, political discourse went through a filtration system before being spread to the public, and civility and consensus were essential characteristics of the media democratic citizens consumed. Our current climate thrives on virality, instant gratification, and the ability for virtually anyone to share information with millions of people. Ideas that used to remain on the fringes of political discourse have become popularized on the internet, and it is much easier for those with extremist views that have been traditionally marginalized by the media to find one another. Ensuring the reliability of the information we consume has become a job that now relies on the individual, and those Mounk labels as the “instigators of instability” have a global platform.⁵ Consequently, the media companies that used to act as the gatekeepers of the “instigators of instability” are facing a decreased consumption of print news and radio, and a

⁵ Yascha Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It*, 17.

consequent struggle to remain financially viable. This downfall of traditional media outlets, coupled with the rise of an entire nation that has access to immeasurable amounts of information, therefore thinking they themselves are experts, has contributed to the sentiments of mistrust toward the media and toward politicians.

Like Mounk, I am interested in the ways by which these cultural, normative shifts in the practice of democracy have created space for unprecedented degrees of populism. Particularly, I am intrigued by the role of rising economic inequality. As Mounk argues, populist rhetoric has resonated with those who feel as though democracy is a zero-sum game. To those who have experienced significant economic disenfranchisement as economic inequality has skyrocketed, perhaps this sentiment is much stronger. To explore this theory, I examine two contemporary liberal democratic states that are experiencing adverse trends in economic inequality. Both of the cases I have chosen for this analysis, the United States and Portugal, are liberal, democratic states that are currently experiencing populism to some degree. In the United States, economic inequality has risen drastically over the past fifty years. Yet, in Portugal, the income gap has become significantly smaller over the past few decades. Both of these states are experiencing populism, but the degree to which populist appeals have been successful varies. In the United States, Donald Trump took hold of the highest office in the nation, and his rhetoric and mantras resonated throughout the country. Meanwhile in Portugal, faith in the European Union is among the highest in Europe, and only one populist politician, André Ventura, has won a seat in the Assembleia da República (Assembly of the Republic). The Assembleia da República is one of few legislatures in Western Europe to maintain such minimal populist representation.⁶ In each of

⁶ Colm Quinn and Katie Livingstone. “Was Portugal's Election a Breakthrough for the Far-Right?” *Foreign Policy*, January 26, 2021.

these states, populist leaders have risen to some degree of power by using similar tactics. Yet, their ability to achieve power is largely dependent on their ability to exploit feelings of economic disenfranchisement within their own domestic cultures, and also upon domestic political institutions.

The juxtaposition between these two states and their positionality within this global wave of populism provides unique insight as to how variance in domestic conditions impact the manifestation of populism. In each of these states, populist leaders have risen to some degree of power by using similar tactics. Yet, many other factors contribute to the rise of populism. In this project, I analyze how political structures, political cultures, and deteriorating economies affect the success of populism. In what ways can political structure, political culture, and the role of deteriorating economies explain why populist sentiments thrive in some places and are relatively weak in others? In addressing these questions, I aim to build upon the work of Yascha Mounk and other scholars who have studied the recent rise of populism. Through analyzing existing populist sentiments in each of these states, how the leaders who perpetuate these sentiments have achieved power within political systems, and where populism geographically thrives in these states, my objective is to better understand what aspects of domestic politics and culture are conducive to populism. This project will advance upon existing studies regarding the rise of populism by focusing on the geography of populist success, which had remained largely understudied. By focusing on how populism is tied to certain economic regions and the structure of political parties, I am to contribute to the broader conversation about why populism emerges and thrives under certain conditions, and why it fails to thrive under different conditions.

Literature Review

Thirty years ago, political scientist Francis Fukuyama declared “the end of history,” the triumph of liberal democracy as the final, uncontested form of societal organization.⁷ Yet, in stark contrast to Fukuyama’s idea that humanity has reached the endpoint of sociocultural evolution and the final form of human government, many well-established liberal democracies are today wrestling with populist appeals and their dangerous side effects. While Fukuyama’s proclamation of “the end of history” once framed the scholarly conversation about democracy and democratization, there is a rift between Fukuyama’s optimistic proclamation for the future of democracy and the moment we currently face.

In 1991, Samuel P. Huntington published “Democracy’s Third Wave,” an article that contextualizes the rise and fall— but overall net gain— of democratic regimes in the twentieth century. The first wave of democratization lasted about a century, beginning in the 1820s when the United States expanded suffrage rights to more of its male population. During the first wave, twenty-nine new democracies entered into the international system. The first reverse wave of democratization, a period of time in which some newly formed democracies failed to consolidate and reverted to authoritarianism, began with the rise of Mussolini. When the Allies won the Second World War, only twelve democratic states existed. However, the beginning of the post-WWII order marked the beginning of the second wave of democratization, which tripled the number of democratic states in existence. By the early nineteen sixties, the second reverse wave again reverted some of these newly transitioned states.

⁷ Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *Globalization and the Challenges of a New Century*: Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000.

At the time of writing “Democracy’s Third Wave,” Huntington displayed confidence that the third wave was well underway. However, just two years after “The End of History” was published, Huntington’s perspective on the future of democracy stood in stark contrast to Fukuyama’s optimism. While Huntington expressed uncertainty at the length of the third wave, he articulated a confidence that the third wave would continue, but nevertheless that a third reverse wave would occur, and perhaps the cycle would continue with a fourth wave to follow. The contrast between Huntington and Fukuyama lies in the fact that Huntington hinted that the net gain of democratic transition may not continue. Unlike Fukuyama, Huntington noted that serious threats to democracy remained. Most notably, he argued that the persistence of democratization was contingent upon continuing global economic growth and the continued reverence of democratic ideals that delegitimize authoritarianism. As global economic growth has slowed and authoritarianism is increasingly viewed as a possible, even preferable alternative to democracy, Huntington’s caveat is timely.

Just a decade after “Democracy’s Third Wave” was published, global attitudes towards democracy had dramatically shifted. Cas Mudde published “The Populist Zeitgeist” in *Government and Opposition*, in which he elaborated upon the normalization of populism within liberal democracies. He argued that the perception of populism has become so mainstream that it may even be a *zeitgeist*; a spirit or mood that claims to characterize the ideas and beliefs of a time period. In addition to elaborating upon the juxtaposition of the people versus the elite as a fundamental component of populism, Mudde also predicts that the populist zeitgeist is a consequence of fundamental shifts in the culture of democracy. Two factors, he argues, have had the most impactful change on the culture of democracy. Firstly, the changed role of the media;

secondly, the increased education of citizens and their subsequent ability to be more critical of politicians. In this age of information, more and more citizens “think they have a good understanding of what politicians do and think they can do it better.”⁸ This increase in citizen’s perception of their own expertise and lack of regard for true expertise– in the media and in government as a whole– plays a large role in the dissemination and normalization of populist rhetoric and in the dissatisfaction of citizens with elected leaders.

Fukuyama’s argument that democracy would prevail as the end form of societal organization has been replaced by not only the populist zeitgeist, but also by what Marc Plattner refers to as a “democratic recession.”⁹ Characteristically, this recession underscores the fading notion of liberal democracy as an intrinsically superior form of societal organization. This recession differs from Huntington’s reverse waves of democratization, as the wave model is contingent upon the notion that democracy is still regarded as the “least bad form of government for their societies.”¹⁰ Plattner explains this shift in thinking by attributing the growing ambivalence toward liberal democracy to authoritarian success. Although it has been disputed whether democracies are more economically prosperous or economic prosperity leads to democracy, the relationship between economic success and democracy has been noted by many. However, the rise of authoritarian states such as China have prompted a reconsideration of this connection. As Plattner notes, “the vigor of leading authoritarian regimes has fostered the sense

⁸ Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist.” *Government and Opposition*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2004, pp. 541–563., doi:10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.

⁹ Marc F. Plattner, "Liberal Democracy's Fading Allure." *Journal of Democracy*, no. 4 (2017): pp 6.

¹⁰ Samuel P. Huntington “Democracy's Third Wave.” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1991, pp. 34.

that liberal democracy is not the only form of government suitable for a strong and modern country.”¹¹ Thus, citizens have become more cynical towards democracy as the only political system that can provide economic prosperity.

When citizens second-guess the intrinsic merits of democracy, we are met with democratic deconsolidation: a decrease in popular support for democracy as a system of government, a rise in anti-system parties and movements, and a lack of acceptance for democratic rules.¹² In "The Danger of Deconsolidation: The Democratic Disconnect," Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk use measures collected by the World Values Survey to better understand democratic deconsolidation. Foa and Mounk outline three key characteristics that determine the degree to which a democracy is deconsolidated: the degree of popular support for democracy as a system of government; the degree to which anti-system parties and movements are weak or nonexistent; and the degree to which democratic rules are accepted.¹³ However, what we are experiencing could be deeper than deconsolidation, argue Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt in *How Democracies Die*. Levitsky and Ziblatt identify four key indicators of authoritarian behavior in democracies: the rejection of democratic norms; the denial of the legitimacy of political opponents; the toleration of violence; and a readiness to curtail civil liberties and the media.¹⁴ These conditions seem eerily familiar to the circumstances facing much of the world today, yet so far from the claims made in "The End of History."

¹¹ Marc F. Plattner, "Liberal Democracy's Fading Allure," 9.

¹² Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, "The Danger of Deconsolidation: The Democratic Disconnect." *Journal of Democracy*, no. 3 (2016): pp 6.

¹³ Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk. "The Danger of Deconsolidation: The Democratic Disconnect," 15.

¹⁴ Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*. (New York, Crown 2019): 23-24.

While these conditions outlined by Foa and Mounk feel reverberant in many liberal democratic countries across the globe, their consequences vary. Populism, as detailed by Nadia Urbaniti in “Political Theory of Populism,” is a global phenomenon that resists generalization and forces political scientists to pay attention to the specific political culture of the society in which it arises.¹⁵ Populism exists as a mutation of constitutional democracy and representative government, and the forms it takes are conditional upon existing democratic institutions. Similarly, successful populism requires a leader that embodies some form of anti-elite, anti-establishment narrative. These narratives, and the legitimization of them by some audience, vary from state to state. Essentially, the manifestation of populism is deeply context-based, and forces a comparative perspective.

If populism is context-based, why is deconsolidation so prevalent across the world? Why does the moment we are currently living in feel so unprecedented, so undemocratic, and borderline authoritarian? According to Yascha Mounk in *The People Vs. Democracy, Why Our Freedom is in Danger and How to Save it*, is because the past stability of democracy was brought about by conditions that are no longer in place.¹⁶ This idea seems to be a consensus among scholars; Mounk, Mudde, and Plattner all mention, in some capacity, a change in the fundamental culture of democracy. Three changes, Mounk argues, have most critically impacted the way liberal democracy operates. Economic inequality has risen to unprecedented levels, perceptions of membership and belonging in democracy are increasingly challenged by a

¹⁵ Nadia Urbaniti, “Political Theory of Populism.” *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 22, (May 2019): 111.

¹⁶ Yascha Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It*, 15.

growing awareness of racism and ethnonationalism, and changes to the media landscape, particularly the introduction of social media, has rewritten norms of communication and information consumption. This moment is different from past moments of crisis, because the nature and culture of democracy, and how we engage with it, are different. Scholars have shifted their attention from Fukuyama's "End of History" claim to the rise of anti-system parties, tolerance of authoritarian behavior, and the dissolution of democratic norms. Our current moment feels so exceptionally far from the Fukuyama's prediction thirty years ago because, as Mounk argues, the decisions we make in this moment "will determine whether terrifying chaos spreads, whether unspeakable cruelty is unleashed, and whether a political system— liberal democracy— that has done more to spread peace and prosperity than any other in the history of humanity can survive."¹⁷ The stakes are high.

This perception of high stakes and the sense that democracy is on the brink of failure is present in almost every liberal democracy, but has been particularly prevalent in the United States after the election of Donald Trump as president in 2016. Michael Kazin elaborates on Trump's brand of American populism, one that is wildly successful but fails to specifically define "the people" to whom it appeals. Perhaps this is tactical; each person can decide for themselves who they would like "the people" to be. However, it may also be a reflection of a growing inability to encompass a cohesive national identity under one umbrella. This itself may be the root of Trump's success, Kazin offers, as those who have flocked to him with unprecedented loyalty often represent those who feel patronized by the very shifts that Mounk

¹⁷ Yascha Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It*, 20.

details. Many citizens who support Trump and his politics claim that American culture prizes “the monied, the cosmopolitan, and the racially diverse.”¹⁸ And while Trump may amplify this rhetoric, he is not the root of the problem in the United States. Bart Bonikowski offers a deeper analysis of American populism, elucidating the connections between anti-elite populism, nationalism and ethnonationalism, and the swapping of democratic norms for authoritarian tendencies. While Trump may be the harbinger of populism and authoritarianism in the U.S., he is hardly the cause. The larger problem, Bonikowski argues, is whether this moment is a reflection of backlash against neoliberalism, globalization, and cultural change, or whether it is an issue of permanence that cannot be solved without an overhaul of American political and economic systems.

Many have tried to theorize why the presence of populism, while it does vary by domestic context, is so universal. Ronald F. Inglehart and Pippa Norris explore two theories that have emerged as the most common hypotheses for the widespread rise of populism, the economic inequality perspective and the cultural backlash thesis.¹⁹ The economic inequality perspective is driven by the profound changes to the workforce in a post-industrial society. These changes include the decline of manufacturing, declining welfare systems and social safety nets, and the rise of globalized flows of labor and capital. According to this school of thought, those most intrigued by and receptive to anti-establishment rhetoric are those left behind by our evolving global economic system, such as unskilled workers or those experiencing long-term

¹⁸ Michael Kazin, "Trump and American Populism: Old Whine, New Bottles," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 6 (November/December 2016): 24.

¹⁹ Ronald F Inglehart and Pippa Norris, "Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash," (July 29, 2016).

unemployment. On the other hand, the cultural backlash theory posits that those most susceptible to populist rhetoric are those who react negatively to progressive cultural change. This theory proposes that, particularly among older generations, there is a sense of cultural displacement as progressive values continue to become mainstream, cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism have increasing societal value, and as access to education has expanded to more of the population. Historically prominent sectors of most Western societies (such as white people, males, and those who are less educated) react angrily to their diminishing status and cultural prominence. These two theories are not antithetical to each other, and as Inglehart and Norris show in their analysis, are most likely interrelated.

Yet, some states have been exempted from the recent turmoil. In Portugal, no populist parties were represented in the legislature until 2019, when the far-right party Chega won just one seat in the parliamentary elections. In Rodrigo Quintas da Silva's article "A Portuguese Exception to Right Wing Populism," Quintas da Silva elucidates four factors that indicate why Portugal has been an anomaly in Europe and across the world.²⁰ The four hypotheses Quintas da Silva cites include low levels of Euroscepticism in Portugal, low immigration rates, lack of political space for populism to develop, and lesser opportunity to communicate populism. These hypotheses, particularly that of low immigration rates and the role of the media and the internet in facilitating communications of populist sentiment, align antithetically with Mounk's three factors that have changed democracy. Susan Salgado poses another theory as to why Portugal is an outlier: Portugal's authoritarian dictatorship was overthrown by a military coup less than fifty

²⁰Rodrigo Quintas da Silva. "A Portuguese Exception to Right-wing Populism. *Palgrave Commun* 4, 7 (2018).

years ago, and Salgado argues that life under the Estado Novo regime is too fresh in national memory. To those who experienced the Salazar regime, she argues, populist rhetoric is unappealing because anti-system parties feel reminiscent of Portugal's recent dictatorship. In fact, the Portuguese constitution actually puts restrictions on the freedom of assembly; it is illegal to assemble a group on the basis of racist or fascist ideologies. Populism also has a place in the Portuguese media, but it is dissimilar from that of the United States. Politicians will label their opponents as populists to delegitimize them, and in opinion pieces populism is often "equated with simple-mindedness, lack of sophistication, and an overly emotional and moralistic approach to politics."²¹ According to Salgado, Portuguese media, particularly well-respected newspapers and mainstream television channels, generally display hostility toward manifestations of political populism. This hostility may be reflective of a collective memory of authoritarianism, a collective memory that makes populism unappealing and quickly silenced in Portugal.

As Cas Mudde suggested in "The Populist Zeitgeist," populism may be the defining political characteristic of the past few decades. Its universality, yet slight variations from state to state, make it difficult to study, define, and prevent. Much remains uncertain. However, perhaps the most pressing questions are whether populism will continue to be a defining characteristic of all democratic societies, and whether democracy will remain the most popular form of societal organization in years to come. One thing is certain, the end of history feels exceptionally far away.

²¹ Susana Salgado. "Where's Populism? Online Media and the Diffusion of Populist Discourses and Styles in Portugal." *European Political Science* 18 (2019).

Methodology

In the words of Nadia Urbanati, “Populism is a global phenomenon whose definitional precariousness is proverbial. It resists generalizations and makes scholars of politics comparativist by necessity, as its language and content are imbued with the political culture of the society in which it arises.”²² It is this very complexity of the concept of populism, and its interdependency on domestic political conditions, that justifies a comparative case study as the most appropriate method to examine shifting cultures of democracy. To probe the idea supported by Mounk, Mudde, and Plattner that the culture of democracy has shifted and that the normative ways in which we engage with democracy have changed, I conduct a comparative case study between the United States and Portugal. Bennett and George note that, when studying variables like democracy and political culture that are “notoriously difficult to measure,” a case study allows an analysis of detailed contextual factors.²³ This method allows an analysis of a variety of domestic factors and offers the opportunity to not only measure these factors individually, but to also explore how they interact.

In the United States case and the Portuguese case, I analyze recent presidential elections. In the United States, I investigate the rise of Donald Trump and the results of the 2016 election. Trump offers a unique example of populism, as the United States is the only liberal democracy that has seen a populist leader reach the government’s highest office. Portugal presents the opposite side of the spectrum. Until 2019, Portugal was one of few liberal democracies worldwide that did not have populist representation in government. Yet, in 2019 André Ventura

²² Nadia Urbanati, “Political Theory of Populism,” pp. 114.

²³ George, Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (MIT Press, 2007): 19.

won a single seat in the legislature, the Assembleia da República. While Ventura's 2019 election caused little concern, his following grew astoundingly quickly. In 2021, Ventura ran for president and received eleven percent of the national vote, sparking nationwide concern about the rise of populism in Portugal.

The United States and Portugal provide two very different perspectives on the emergence of populism in liberal democracies. These two states vary in the degree to which populism has been electorally successful, they have differing political structures, and unique political cultures. Most notably, these two cases display opposite trends in regard to economic inequality. In the United States, income inequality has increased over the past few decades, and has reached unprecedented levels. Yet, in Portugal, income inequality has shown trends that display almost the exact reverse of the United States, and income inequality is at one of the lowest levels since democratization in 1974. Regardless of the wealth gap in each state, both the U.S. and Portugal are home to Rust Belt economies, cities and towns that were once manufacturing hubs but now are experiencing a substantial decline in living standards. The role of Rust Belts, deteriorating economies that often harbor economic resentment, is largely understudied when considering populist success. By juxtaposing these two states, I investigate how the intersection of these domestic conditions contribute to the success of populism.

To conduct this analysis, I follow in similar structure in each case. First, I analyze the tactics by which each of the populist politicians in question rose to power. This includes utilizing a framework of populist strategies articulated by Bart Bonikowski and involves a brief analysis of how each presidential candidate in question behaves in regard to democratic norms in their respective state. Second, I offer a short analysis of the recent history of populism in these states,

which contextualizes the rise of each presidential candidate within a larger picture of populism in each state. Next, I provide an analysis of how the structure of political parties has affected the success of populist politicians. This includes an analysis of the election process, and also a brief acknowledgment of how political institutions affect one's ability to continue to violate democratic norms once in office. I then provide a geographic analysis of presidential elections in each state. These analyses focus on the relative success of populist candidates in Rust Belt regions in comparison to other regions, and also in comparison to election years in which no anti-establishment candidates were on the ballot. From these data, I draw conclusions about the geographic relevance of populism in areas experiencing significant economic hardship. Lastly, I offer insights towards how these factors contribute to the overall success of populist appeals and how these factors contribute to the perception that democracy is a zero-sum endeavor.

I expect to see two fundamental differences between the United States and Portugal. The first difference I anticipate is that partisan structure of each state will impact how populist politician achieve power. I anticipate that, because of the two-party structure in the United States, it will be much easier to not only achieve power, but also to affect real change once in office. In Portugal, I predict that the multi-party system makes it much more difficult for one to gain political power, and the coalition-building structure of the legislature also makes it much more difficult to pass legislation once in office. In this regard, I anticipate populism to be mitigated by the structure of Portuguese government. The second difference I anticipate between these two cases is a variance in the degree to which populism is present in Rust Belt regions. In the U.S., where economic inequality has produced a significant decline in living standards, I anticipate that these regions will be much quicker to support populism. In Portugal, while economically

disenfranchised regions exist, I expect the support for populism in these regions to exceed the rest of the nation, but to be comparatively weak compared to the United States.

In many ways, the differences between the United States and Portugal are the very criteria that make the two cases well-suited for comparison. The variance in economic inequality between the US and Portugal will provide context on the relationship between economic inequality and the rise of populism, particularly in regard to the role of Rust Belt economies and their hypothesized role in advancing populism. Although the states have two different political structures, this variance in political structure allows an analysis of how the role of political parties within political system impact the success of populism. The United States and Portugal have two very different histories in regard to populism and authoritarianism, however I do not anticipate these historical contexts to impact these analyses.

In the following pages, I first offer a brief overview of the contradictions between democracy and economic inequality, and detail how the United States and Portugal vary in terms of their current wealth distributions. I then provide a historical analysis of the United States in the 1970s, which draws parallels between the United States fifty years ago and the United States today. This section illustrates that many of the conditions currently present in the United States have existed before. If many of the political and cultural divisions in the United States are not unprecedented, then something else must have shifted in U.S. political culture to allow populism to thrive. Following this, I analyze the campaign and election of Donald Trump in 2016, utilizing the methods outlined previously. I then utilize the same methods to discuss the Portuguese presidential election of 2021, in which André Ventura ran for office. Finally, I offer my

conclusions regarding how domestic conditions impact the manifestation of populism in these two states.

Democracy and Inequality

The social experiments of democracy and capitalism have always been at odds. Although free markets have brought unprecedented economic growth to many, they have also brought the challenges of ever-widening gaps of income, increased job insecurity, and have created catastrophic challenges for the future of earth's climate.²⁴ And while capitalism has at times been a vessel for democracy, the very foundations of capitalism are undemocratic in nature. Capitalism constantly increases inequality between social classes, a byproduct of its operation that is fundamentally incompatible with the objectives of democracy. It is difficult for democratic institutions to thrive, or even function, under conditions that continuously divide countries and communities by income and wealth. The existence of excessive concentrations of wealth in societies that preach equality and opportunity is a recipe for political trouble, particularly when these conditions are exacerbated by turbulent international and domestic climates, such as a pandemic and global economic recession.

Each of the factors that Yascha Mounk argues have fundamentally changed democracy are in some way contradictory to democratic values. Systems of racial hierarchy are antithetical in nature to freedom and equality, yet much of the scaffolding of many contemporary liberal democracies relies on systematic exclusion. Democracy relies on independent and trustworthy media to inform, criticize, and stimulate debate. However, the concentration of media ownership in corporate hands has limited the scope of information available, and the internet has increased the circulation of misinformation. Both of these factors are in opposition to the nature and philosophical foundations of democracy. Yet, the third issue Mounk identifies, the issue of rising inequality, is perhaps the most pressing. Issues of racial exclusion and the rise of mass media are

²⁴ Robert B. Reich, "How Capitalism Is Killing Democracy." *Foreign Policy*, October 12, 2009.

closely intertwined to the relationship between democracy and capitalism. Across the world, race continues to be one of the most critical factors in determining one's chances in life. Existing racial wealth gaps are extreme, and rising inequality in many liberal democratic states has diminished the prospects of economic mobility for those who do have the resources to break the cycles.²⁵ A more equitable distribution of economic growth is intrinsically intertwined with efforts to address racial disparities. In addition, the rise of the internet and social media is reflective of the ever-growing role of corporations in democracy. Twitter and Facebook, along with other tech giants, have become the primary battlefields of political debate during election seasons, have prompted conversations about the nature of free speech and hate speech online, and recently have been attempting to cope with their role in spreading misinformation.

“Clickbait” has become a term common among those who frequently consume news online and refers to misleading or overexaggerated headlines that implore readers to open an article solely to generate higher revenue.²⁶ Concentration of media ownership has caused the downfall of many local news outlets, and as fewer individuals control shares of the mass media, less perspectives are shared. Both of these factors, enduring racial hierarchies and the rise of mass media, can be traced back to late-stage capitalism and rising inequality on a global scale.

Democracy's ideological core is often equated with a desire to pursue the common good. Yet, the democratic ideals of compromise and majoritarian decision-making are antithetical to the hierarchical nature of corporate structures. And while the essence of democracy is that each citizen has an equal say, or an equal vote, inequality makes that promise exceptionally hard to

²⁵ United Nations, “World Social Report 2020: Inequality in a Rapidly Changing World.” www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/01/World-Social-Report-2020-FullReport.pdf.

²⁶ Kevin Munger, “All the News That's Fit to Click: The Economics of Clickbait Media,” *Political Communication* 37:3 (2020): 376.

deliver. Political campaigns are increasingly reliant on large donations from corporations or individual donations from the exceptionally wealthy, and campaigns funded by grassroots efforts alone often fail in comparison to those that accept money from corporate lobbyists. Some studies have even shown that those in the bottom tiers of society retreat from political participation, increasingly aware of their minimal influence.²⁷ It is unsurprising that millennials and Gen Z—the same generations that are increasingly less attached to democracy—are increasingly critical of capitalism.²⁸ These generations are facing minimal opportunities to get a high-paying job with good benefits and lower prospects of upward mobility.²⁹ Perhaps addressing democracy's undemocratic tendency to widen wealth gaps and favor those at the top could restore the younger generations' faith in a system founded on principles of equality.

Establishing what the normative relationship between democracy and capitalism should be is an ever-present source of political conflict. Typically, politicians take one of two sides when it comes to opinions on the relationship between the market and democracy. Those on the right frequently advocate for a hands-off approach and maintain that the government should interfere with markets as minimally as possible. These thinkers often believe that economic success and the wealth distribution is a product of personal initiative, and that the government should not try to redistribute wealth by means other than minimal taxation. Those on the left typically tend to consider redistributive efforts as the responsibility of the state. According to this view, political struggle and mobilization, such as unionizing, are essential to challenging the injustice of the

²⁷ Arend Lijphart. "Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma." *The American Political Science Review* 91, no. 1 (1997): 1-14.

²⁸ Lydia Saad. "Socialism as Popular as Capitalism Among Young Adults in U.S." *Gallup.com*, Gallup, January 14, 2021.

²⁹ Charles F. Andrain. *Political Power and Economic Inequality: A Comparative Policy Approach*. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014), 1.

market.³⁰ In many liberal democracies, there are commonly disagreements about what the role of democratic government is in regulating a capitalist system.

While the ever-widening gap between the rich and the working class is present in most democratic nations, it is not universal. Wealth distribution looks very different in liberal democracies across the globe. The United States, for example, has become increasingly unequal over the past forty years. At the end of World War II, income inequality in the US sharply fell, and remained relatively low for decades. By 1979, the United States had reached its lowest level of inequality on record, according to a World Bank time series that uses the Gini coefficient to measure income inequality. The Gini coefficient is measured on a scale of zero to one, with a Gini coefficient of zero expressing perfect income equality. If a state had a Gini coefficient of zero, every person would have the exact same amount of income. A Gini coefficient of one indicates maximal inequality, in which one person hypothetically receives all income and all the others receive nothing. The Gini coefficient in the United States in 1979, at its lowest point on record, was 34.5.³¹ However, income inequality in the US has risen steadily since 1980. In 2016, the most recent year for which the World Bank has published data, the United States had reached its highest levels of income inequality on record, with a Gini coefficient of 41.1. Many hypothesize that since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, income inequality in the US has increased to an even greater degree.³²

In Portugal, income inequality trends look very different. Before Portugal democratized, most of the nation's wealth was concentrated among about forty families.³³ Poverty rates were

³⁰ Thomas Piketty, *Capital and Ideology* (Harvard University Press, 2020), 36.

³¹ "Gini Index (World Bank Estimate)." *World Bank*, "Gini Index (World Bank Estimate)." *World Bank*, data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=US&view=chart.

³² Zia Qureshi, "Tackling the Inequality Pandemic: Is There a Cure?" *Brookings*, Brookings Institute, November 17, 2020.

³³ Eric Solsten, ed. *Portugal: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1993.

among the highest in Europe, and almost the entire corporate network of the country was tied to wealthy governing families. As Portugal began to integrate into postwar multilateral organizations such as the European Free trade Association, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and the International Monetary Fund, many domestic industries began to take off. Working class people began to see some improved quality of life, but not much.³⁴ Life under the authoritarian regime was largely unequal. After the Carnation Revolution led to the democratization of Portugal in 1974, inequality slightly rose for a few decades while the new state developed. By the early 2000s, income inequality in Portugal began to sharply fall as a result of expansive social policies aimed at addressing poverty and expanding the welfare state.³⁵ World Bank data on Portugal begins in 2003, and recorded levels of income inequality peaked in 2004 with a Gini coefficient of 38.9.³⁶ These levels dropped steadily until the 2008 financial crisis, during which income inequality briefly rose again, but as of 2017 Portugal had achieved its lowest level on income inequality on record, reporting a Gini coefficient of 33.8. While Portugal has significantly closed its wealth gap and is much more equal than the United States, it remains one of the most unequal among European Union member states.³⁷

The United States and Portugal have very different historical contexts that have influenced the current state of economic inequality, but perhaps their differences are also somewhat cultural. In the United States, the very foundations of the American Dream rely upon the belief that prosperity and success are available to those who simply work hard, and that hard work will deliver upward mobility. Economic success, by most American cultural standards, is a

³⁴ Eric Solsten, ed. *Portugal: A Country Study*.

³⁵ Carlos Farinha Rodrigues and Isabel Andrade, "Portugal: There and Back Again, An Inequality's Tale," *Oxford Scholarship Online* (April 2014).

³⁶ "Gini Index (World Bank Estimate)." *World Bank*.

³⁷ Pascale Davies, "Which Countries Have the Worst Income Inequality in Europe?" *Euronews*, April 26, 2018.

reflection of work ethic, competency, and success. Americans are more likely to prioritize themselves over a group, and often feel as though giving economic assistance to others comes at their own expense. The economic narrative of the American Dream provides a justification of who is at the top and who is at the bottom of society.³⁸ This reflects a very individualistic national culture. In Portugal, the cultural narratives are quite the opposite. Many Portuguese citizens are implored to express concern on the behalf of society as a whole because of the overwhelming presence of Catholicism. In Portugal today, about seventy-seven percent of the nation self-identifies with the Catholic religion.³⁹ The Catholic church deeply values serving others, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged. This religious obligation has been reflected throughout Portuguese history. Under the Estado Novo regime, almost all forms of social aid were derived from the church rather than the state.⁴⁰ After the regime fell, these practices of caring for others were codified into national systems, like the universal national healthcare system. In recent years, Portugal became an international exemplar for their response to their opioid crisis, in which the state became the first in the world to decriminalize all drugs. Under the national healthcare system, those suffering from addiction were able to access free rehabilitation instead of facing incarceration, and opioid use in Portugal rapidly fell.⁴¹

As economic inequality continues to grow and politicians are increasingly divided about the role of government in addressing this growth, those who feel the effects of rising inequality may begin to feel more desperate. Populism thrives in environments where people feel

³⁸ Luke Winslow *Economic Injustice and the Rhetoric of the American Dream* (Lexington Books, 2017): 3.

³⁹ Kelsey Jo Starr, "Five Facts about Catholics in Europe." Pew Research Center, Pew Research Center, 31 May 2020.

⁴⁰ Duncan Simpson, "A Igreja Católica e o Estado Novo De Salazar." *Portuguese and Brazilian Studies* 18:1 (Dec. 2012), 90.

⁴¹ Austin Frakt, "Pointers From Portugal on Addiction and the Drug War." *The New York Times*, October 5, 2020.

disenfranchised and unheard, particularly in an economic sense. While populism exists in Portugal to some degree, it is minimal in comparison to the United States. Perhaps the variance in economic inequality in each state, combined with the common narratives about wealth and one's relation to others, can offer valuable insight towards why populism is prevalent in some states, and less prevalent in others.

The United States in the 1970s

The 1970s were a tumultuous and divisive decade in the United States, and many of the sentiments and divisions created in this era are similar to the challenges the United States is facing today. The sixties were an era defined by the passage of some of the United States' most transformative legislation, however as the decade turned, the institutions that glued America together seemed to be eroding and the actual execution of many of the new civil rights laws passed in the sixties proved to be difficult and divisive. In most narratives of the seventies, the decade is characterized by economic decline, political corruption, and public distrust. U.S. troops retreated from Vietnam in defeat, Richard Nixon tainted the reputation of the presidency in the Watergate scandal and became the first president to resign, and Americans' confidence in their economic future sank. The seventies were a marked shift from the prosperity of the post-war era; Americans across the political spectrum deeply questioned the efficacy and legitimacy of their democracy and were increasingly distrustful of institutions of democracy and of each other.

One of the most profound challenges that defined the 1970s was the continued struggle for equal rights. The sixties were a decade of many groundbreaking legislative changes: The Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Equal Pay Act of 1963, and more. At the heart of the continuing movement for civil rights was the ongoing struggle for Black liberation. The Black Power movement peaked in the seventies, advocating for both for Black political and economic self-sufficiency and serving as a response to American white supremacy. Leaders of the movement, like Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael, led Black Americans in the pursuit of new cultural, economic, and social systems that allowed Black communities to become independent of white-dominated institutions and begin to determine their own futures.⁴² While

⁴² "The Foundations of Black Power." *National Museum of African American History and Culture*, August 12, 2019.

the Black Power movement brought a surge in Black-owned businesses, publications, and even ambulance services, the issue of education remained intrinsically tied to the government. Much of the turmoil and racial conflict of the 1970s can be traced back to the continued failure of the U.S. government to deliver on the promises of school integration declared almost two decades earlier in *Brown v. Board of Education*. National public opinion surveys painted optimistic pictures of racial attitudes, declaring that more and more white Americans were enthusiastic about integration. Yet, these surveys were often more reflective of what white Americans thought they ought to say rather than what they believed and practiced.⁴³ In reality, cases like *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, which ruled that education is not a fundamental right, affirmed that it is Constitutional to underfund low-income school districts that are mainly comprised of non-white students. Thus, students of color remained stuck in inferior school districts while white students attended schools funded by high property taxes. Even in places where school integration was happening, “white flight” occurred, a phenomenon in which many white Americans migrated away from rapidly integrating urban neighborhoods and relocated in the suburbs. For those who stayed, it quickly became evident that putting Black students and white students in the same building was seldom effective in bridging social divides.

As the struggle for Black liberation continued, many other historically marginalized communities found encouragement in the continuing growth—albeit slow growth—of Americans who began to agree that the Black community deserved equal rights and equal treatment.⁴⁴ Each of these groups—including but not limited to women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and

⁴³ Joseph P. Fried. “Study Finds Steady Rise in Whites' Acceptance of Integration.” *The New York Times*, 8 December 8, 1971.

⁴⁴ Thomas Borstelmann, “The Rising Tide of Equality and Democratic Reform.” *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 76.

Native Americans— each have a long history of political organizing and activism, and their pursuit of equal rights was not created solely in response to the Black freedom struggle. Yet, there was a sense of hope in the late sixties and early seventies, a sense that those fighting for racial equity had created a ripple effect that prompted Americans to be more receptive of all pursuits of equal rights. The second wave of feminism reached its peak in the seventies, and for the first time, the cultural roles women were expected to play in society were subject to scrutiny. An array of Supreme Court Decisions such as *Roe v. Wade*, *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, and *Reed vs. Reed* (argued by future Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg), were landmark cases for women’s rights. The Title IX amendment to the Higher Education Act was passed in 1972, which had massive ramifications for female college athletes and the prosecution of campus sexual assault. *Our Bodies, Ourselves* became a national bestseller, a book written by women as an attempt to reclaim their health in a society where most physicians were male. From 1969 to 1971, Native Americans forced themselves back into view of white Americans, occupying Alcatraz Island for nineteen months in to protest land seizures and the disproportionate poverty rates in Native communities. Additionally, Native Americans and allies occupied Wounded Knee for ten weeks in an attempt to remind Americans of their colonial history, and to shed light on the intergenerational oppression of Native Americans. After the landmark Stonewall Riots at the Stonewall Inn nightclub in New York City, the first gay rights marches took place.

Homosexuality was removed from the American Psychiatric Associations list of mental disorders in 1973, and several dozen U.S. cities added sexual orientation to their civil rights laws.⁴⁵ Through persistent activism and advocacy, many historically marginalized communities increased their social visibility in the seventies. This also led to the rise of identity politics, the notion that one’s identity impacts political decision-making. As identity became a more salient

⁴⁵ Thomas Borstelmann, “The Rising Tide of Equality and Democratic Reform,” 107.

issue in political and social spheres, it also prompted backlash from those who felt that their own conceptions of American identity were threatened.

As more and more Americans fought for new conceptions of equality and for an increasingly visible presence in the public sphere, traditional narratives of American history began to shift. At the same time, America's retreat from Vietnam was the nation's first military defeat in decades, and the economy plummeted downwards. Many people, namely white men, became fearful as the America that had once uniquely served them began to change on all fronts. The recipe for backlash was perfect; the economy spiraled as marginalized people became more and more visible, and it was increasingly easy to blame one's own economic blight on the new success of historically marginalized groups. Many conservatives tried to regulate the presence of Black Power organizations and demonstrations on college campuses, and often encouraged protests for Black liberation to be met with militant police presence. In cities like Detroit, legislators, school board members, and police unions actively fought school integration plans over fifteen years after *Brown vs. Board of Education*.⁴⁶ Anti-feminist movements emerged, and organizers like Phyllis Schlafly lobbied against the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. While overt backlash towards marginalized groups was plentiful, there was also a more subtle movement occurring. There was a partisan shift in the United States, and conservative politicians began to weaponize the fear and hostility harbored by many white Americans. At this time, the New Right emerged, a redefinition of conservative political values that was rooted in the perceived decline of "morality" in America. This new conservative movement opposed

⁴⁶ Jerry M. Flint, "INTEGRATION PLAN FOUGHT IN DETROIT." *The New York Times*, June 13, 1970.

“immoral” changes to American society, namely abortion, homosexuality, feminism, affirmative action, and most forms of taxation.⁴⁷

In response to this growing distaste toward the perceived loss of American values and morality, conservative activists and politicians began to rebrand themselves. These new appeals were directed to middle-class white Americans, those who felt abandoned by powerful liberals and threatened by growing respect for multiculturalism in America.⁴⁸ “Middle America,” as this new constituency was named, took on multiple vague meanings in society. Middle America was the land between the two coasts, traditional Americans who felt disenfranchised by the glamour and intellectuals of America’s coastal cities. Middle America was a socioeconomic status that referred to those who weren’t benefitting from the expansion of social welfare programs, but also were not the wealthy elite. Middle America represented the “forgotten” Americans, American whose lives seemed to remain stagnant among a storm of social and economic changes.⁴⁹ Politicians learned to harness the fear and resentment of these individuals and branded themselves as the authentic representatives of these “true” Americans. Using these tactics, the GOP found itself able to cross gaps of income and occupation they had not crossed since before the Great Depression. As Michael Kazin phrases this shift in *The Populist Persuasion*, “The Grand Old Party turned itself into a counter-elite and a welcome home for white refugees from the liberal crack up.”⁵⁰

At the heart of this political shift and rebranding of the Republican party was President Nixon. While Nixon would eventually become the object of public distrust, his path to the

⁴⁷ “New Right.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., www.britannica.com/topic/New-Right.

⁴⁸ Michael Kazin, “The Conservative Capture: From Nixon to Reagan.” *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (Cornell University Press, 2017): 247.

⁴⁹ Michael Kazin, “The Conservative Capture: From Nixon to Reagan,” 246.

⁵⁰ Michael Kazin, “The Conservative Capture: From Nixon to Reagan,” 246.

presidency and through a landslide reelection campaign in 1972 was characterized by an exploitation of much of the nation's stress. His past set him apart from other politicians of the time; his parents owned a struggling grocery store, and he was raised by devout Quakers that emanated self-discipline.⁵¹ Nixon himself represented Middle-America, and he mobilized a voter base that he called "the great majority of Americans, the forgotten Americans, the non-shouters, the non-demonstrators."⁵² Nixon and his administration were not quiet about their distaste for television networks and daily news publications, particularly the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. These outlets were ridiculed for being monopolized by leftists, and at one point Vice President Spiro Agnew said the media were "a tiny and closed fraternity of privileged men, elected by no one, and enjoying a monopoly sanctioned and licensed by government."⁵³ The media, Nixon's administration argued, had a radical liberal agenda and was composed of the very people that Middle Americans disagreed with. Yet, Nixon's status as a representative of Middle America was stripped in 1974 as the Watergate scandal unfolded. The office of the president was now tainted by the very scandal and corruption Americans felt penetrated all other democratic institutions.

As Americans' faith in their democratic institutions crumbled, so did the economy. Between 1974 and 1981, the unemployment rate never went below five percent, and the inflation rate reached seven percent or higher in 1974, 1975, and every year between 1978 and 1981.⁵⁴ The term "stagflation," the simultaneous, rare occurrence of high prices and high unemployment, became part of the average American's vocabulary.⁵⁵ The United States, along with many other

⁵¹ Michael Kazin, "The Conservative Capture: From Nixon to Reagan," 249.

⁵² Michael Kazin, "The Conservative Capture: From Nixon to Reagan," 251.

⁵³ Michael Kazin, "The Conservative Capture: From Nixon to Reagan," 253.

⁵⁴ Edward D. Berkowitz, "Introduction." *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (Columbia University Press, 2007): 1.

⁵⁵ Edward D. Berkowitz, "Introduction," 1.

Western countries, faced an oil shortage in 1973 and 1974 and became reliant on other states for oil. For the first time in many years, Americans felt that, because of the oil shortage, foreign powers exercised some form of control over their lives. Neither politicians nor economists had compelling answers to explain the oil crisis and the subsequent recession. This economic stress, combined with the Nixon administration's repeated assaults on the media and the Watergate scandal, led many American to be skeptical of political institutions and of expertise.

While the 1970s is often characterized as a time when Americans had deep skepticism toward their government, they also began to express skepticism towards big corporations, especially the oil giants who seemed to be failing them. In a 1971 article in *The New York Times*, a senior officer of one of the world's largest oil companies is quoted saying "Our problem is that we don't have the money to do a lot of things." A musician who caught wind of this comment responded "The oil companies, as far as I know, have never been poor."⁵⁶ The oil executive and the musician are representative of the relationship between the public and the corporate elite in the 1970s. There was widespread, all-consuming fear in the middle and working classes about economic futures, and wealthy corporate executives were the enemy of the people.

As people's faith in government started to deteriorate, it shifted in two ways. Not only did Americans start to see the government as dysfunctional, but they also started to think that the government simply didn't care about providing aid to ordinary Americans. Take, for example, the food stamp program. As the number of Americans unemployed rapidly rose, so did the number of Americans eligible for food stamps. At one point in 1975, the Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs reported that only thirty eight percent of those eligible for food stamps were being reached by the program.⁵⁷ On top of that, the amount of time

⁵⁶ Edward Cowan. "Oil Crisis– The Perception Gap." *The New York Times*, December 16, 1973.

⁵⁷ "Food Stamp Inefficiency." *The New York Times*, March 17, 1975.

it took to certify one's eligibility for the program was exceptionally long, leaving many food insecure families without a lifeline as the cost of groceries continued to rise. Instead of perceiving government aid programs like this one as a means to smoothly and efficiently support the American people, those who were dealing with economic hardship criticized that the government was making it usually difficult to receive the help they deserve. As big corporations raked in profits, blue collar Americans struggled to put food on the table. Americans were not only angry, but they were also afraid. An unemployed parent described his fear as follows:

“... to be 52 years old and jobless is to be frightened—frightened to the marrow of your bones. Your days start with it, and end with it: It's all-pervasive. It's numbing. It's mind-boggling. It's to realize the simple stunning fact that you are without meaningful representation in this society. And in the late evening when your household is quiet and you switch off the bedroom light it's to be alone, alone like you've never been before.”⁵⁸

The 1970s widened the chasm between America's elite and middle- and working-class people, people who were rapidly losing hope that their democracy could save them.

The 1970s marked a time of widespread democratization across the globe, but democracy in America was in deep disorder. The seventies brought victories for historically marginalized groups, victories that were often met with violent backlash and the rise of identity politics. As the American political sphere grew more fractured, conservative politicians rebranded and created the New Right, a vague yet all-encompassing conservative attempt to mobilize those who felt displaced by the entrance of women, people of color, queer people, and other historically marginalized groups into the political sphere. Richard Nixon used these tactics in his 1968 campaign, and again in 1972 to win reelection in a landslide. The oil crisis and economic

⁵⁸ Edward B. Furey, “The Fear, the Numbing Fear.” *The New York Times*, April 1, 1975.

recession beginning shortly thereafter crushed the confidence of Americans who had grown accustomed to the nation's postwar economic success, and few people had faith that their political systems could remedy the crisis at hand. Nixon was willing to exploit already-existing conflicts of identity, and identity becomes an increasingly important factor in voter preferences in times of economic distress.⁵⁹ These political and social crises of the 1970s are largely similar to many of the challenges facing the United States today. This tumultuous decade sorted Americans into categories of "us" versus "them" in a multitude of ways, and people's trust in one another and in the government as a whole dwindled.

Although the challenges to democracy in the seventies seem to mirror much of America's contemporary political climate, it often feels as though contemporary America is in much deeper crisis than the America of the 1970s. In recent years, right-wing extremism and populism have become so widespread that some are anticipating the emergence of a new political party based on these ideals, the abandonment of democratic norms is often perceived as excusable, and young Americans are increasingly less attached to democracy as a whole.⁶⁰ But democracy was also deep in crisis in the seventies, so why has our current moment raised unprecedented alarm in academics and world leaders? Perhaps this is because the economic gaps between the rich and the working class that began to widen in the seventies never closed. Since 1974, the Gini coefficient, a measure of economic inequality calculated each year by the World Bank, has increased from 34.5 to 41.1 in the United States.⁶¹ In comparison, the average Gini coefficient among OECD countries was 0.318 in 2017, and the United States was the third most unequal

⁵⁹ Petar Stankov, *The Political Economy of Populism* (Taylor & Francis, 2021), 23.

⁶⁰ Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, "The Danger of Deconsolidation: The Democratic Disconnect." *Journal of Democracy*, no. 3 (2016): 6.

⁶¹ "Gini Index (World Bank Estimate)." *World Bank*, "Gini Index (World Bank Estimate)." *World Bank*, data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=US&view=chart.

OECD member state.⁶² In the following section, I explore how populist discourse in contemporary America, particularly the campaign and election of Donald Trump, is exacerbated by many of the same sentiments that existed in the 1970s. I also consider how economic inequality and its effects on specific geographic regions contributes to the success of populist appeals.

⁶² Thévenot, Celine. "Inequality in OECD Countries." *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health* 45, no. 18 (August 2017): 9.

United States Case Analysis

From the first days of Donald Trump’s presidential campaign in 2015, his ascendancy to the highest office in the United States has been described as “unprecedented.” Since the election of Trump in 2016, political scientists, journalists, and the American public have attempted to piece together what factors allowed such an unconventional candidate to be elected president of the United States. Further, many also have attempted to diagnose what the election of Donald Trump means in regard to where American democracy is headed. While Trump was unprecedented in many regards, many of the cultural and political phenomena that allowed him to win the Republican nomination and the presidency have been brewing in the United States for years. Trump and Trumpism may be relatively new to the United States, but the ideas and sentiments evoked by his populist rhetoric are longstanding. In this chapter, I detail how various structural, cultural, and historical factors allowed Donald Trump to tie together existing political tensions in an unprecedented way.

Trump’s Use of Populist Tactics

On June 16th, 2015, Donald Trump formally announced his candidacy for president. In a speech given at the Trump Tower in New York City, he began to lay the groundwork of the very themes that would define his campaign and his presidency: a repudiation of federal debt, immigration, offshoring of jobs, terrorism, political correctness, and the media.⁶³ When Trump announced his candidacy, he entered a race of sixteen Republicans, many of whom had served as governor or senator. His entry into the Republican primary drew significant media attention, yet other candidates seemed to dismiss him as a legitimate opponent. As Trump launched himself

⁶³ Jackie Calmes, “Donald Trump: Campaigns and Elections.” *Miller Center*, October 18, 2017.

into the political sphere, other candidates brushed him to the side and concentrated their efforts on distinguishing themselves from their opponents with more noteworthy political credentials, candidates like Governor Jeb Bush of Florida, Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, Senator Marco Rubio of Florida, and Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin. While Trump was certainly a loud voice in the Republican primaries, his entry into the pool of candidates was initially perceived as temporary and nonthreatening.

Although Trump's fellow candidates seemed to worry little about his entry into the primaries, he landed the number one spot in multiple polls not even a month after entering the presidential race.⁶⁴ Some analysts were quick to attribute this speedy success to name recognition, arguing that Trump's accomplishments in the polls were temporary and misleading.⁶⁵ Yet, Trump's lead remained fairly consistent throughout the summer and into the fall of 2015. As the primaries got underway, it became evident that Trump's success was not simply a statistical error easily explained by name recognition. Twitter became the central platform of Trump's campaign, with his tweets often going viral among supporters and critics alike. His connections in the television industry, combined with his entertaining personality, landed him frequent interviews and airtime that other candidates lacked. Well before 2015 came to a close, Trump was filling stadiums and convention centers with his supporters. His campaign rallies developed a unique atmosphere, one that was almost more akin to a concert or sporting event than a stop on a political campaign trail.⁶⁶ Supporters of Trump would attend the events donning "Make America Great Again" t-shirts and hats, and oftentimes alcoholic beverages were served at concession counters. These events fostered a particular energy in Trump supporters

⁶⁴ Colin Campbell, "Donald Trump Has Surged to the Top of 2 New 2016 Polls," *Business Insider*, 9 July 2015.

⁶⁵ Maxwell Tani, "Here's Why Republicans Shouldn't Worry about Donald Trump's Surge." *Business Insider*, 2 July 2015.

⁶⁶ Phelps, Jordyn. "The Anatomy of a Donald Trump Rally." *ABC News Network*, 23 Nov. 2015.

similar to the that shared by fans of a sports team; they had a shared identity. As the primaries progressed, it became increasingly evident that identity was a vital component of Trump's success. His ascendancy in the polls quickly made clear that while his political credentials did not match that of many of his primary competitors, he was a serious contender for the Republican nomination. While other Republican candidates and party leaders dismissed him, Trump's appeals to identity resonated with many Republican voters. As Trump's popularity continued to grow, so did his image as an antiestablishment leader who arrived to take back the Republican party.

According to Bart Bonikowski, Trump utilized three very common right-wing, authoritarian tactics in his campaign, tactics that allowed him to elicit support from a new, or perhaps dormant, type of Republican and independent voter.⁶⁷ First, he lamented Washington elites and frequently criticized his Republican adversaries for being out of touch with the "true" American people. Although political elites suffered attacks from Trump, he broadened his assault on elitism to encompass virtually every form of expertise. When Trump was once asked what he believed to be the greatest domestic threat facing the United States, he responded by citing "the three most dangerous voices in America: academic elites, political elites, and media elites."⁶⁸ Trump's hostility to mainstream media was perhaps the most consequential rejection of elitism throughout his campaign. The emergence of the phrase "fake news" led to a semantic debate about the nature of truth and facts in the media, which has greatly impacted the information landscape in the United States.⁶⁹ Trump's rejection of the media as a pillar of democracy was one

⁶⁷ Bart Bonikowski, "Trump's Populism: The Mobilization of Nationalist Cleavages and the Future of U.S. Democracy." *When Democracy Trump's Populism: Lessons from Europe & Latin America*, edited by Kurt Weyland and Raúl Madrid (New York: Cambridge University Press): 112.

⁶⁸ Cathleen Decker, "Analysis: Trump's War Against Elites and Expertise." *Los Angeles Times*, 27 July 2017.

⁶⁹ Pablo J. Boczkowski and Zizi Papacharissi. *Trump and the Media* (The MIT Press, 2018): 7.

of his earliest dismissals of democratic norms and processes, a trend that continued throughout his campaign and presidency.

This disregard for democratic norms and processes is the second common populist tactic Bonikowski details. Trump used anti-elite rhetoric to convince his supporters that the entire political system is corrupt, and that his disregard for normative political processes was simply an attempt to take back control for these “true” Americans. This familiar populist strategy allows proponents of radical-right ideologies to justify authoritarian behavior in the name of democratic reform and carves a path through which a lack of adherence to democratic norms appears justified. In campaigns, this often manifests as the delegitimization of political institutions, an encouragement of violence, or a threatening of political opponents.⁷⁰ Along the campaign trail, Trump’s bombastic threats to jail Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton were some of his earliest violations of norms of democratic discourse, and he never slowed. Chants of “Lock her up!” rang throughout almost every Trump rally, as he developed an image of Clinton that aligned perfectly with the very elitist, political dynasties he claimed had abandoned American people. His comments toward Clinton, which were often gendered, only skim the surface of the misogynistic remarks made on the campaign trail. The vast majority of Trump’s female opponents were subjected to his critiques of their physical appearance, with many of these comments classifying as sexual harassment.⁷¹ Trump also revived the phrase “Drain the swamp,” coined by Ronald Reagan in the early eighties, indicating that if elected, he would cleanse Washington of the very political elites and bureaucrats he so despised.⁷² In the three weeks leading up to election day in

⁷⁰ Pablo J. Boczkowski and Zizi Papacharissi. *Trump and the Media*, 7.

⁷¹ Ritu Prasad, “How Trump Talks About Women— And Does It Matter?” *BBC News*, 29 Nov. 2019.

⁷² Michael D. Shear, and Gardiner Harris, “Trump Wants to ‘Drain the Swamp,’ but Change Will Be Complex and Costly.” *The New York Times*, 11 Nov. 2016.

2016, Trump tweeted the words “Drain the swamp” seventy-nine times.⁷³ The relevance of this promise is twofold, as it not only reflects a delegitimization of existing democratic institutions, but also insinuated that once in power he would be able to fundamentally restructure the bureaucracy by his own means. Those who opposed Trump watched in shock as he repeatedly threatened his opponents, threatened political institutions, and at times encouraged violence. Over and over, Trump made comments and claims that would have previously marked the swift downfall of a political candidate. Instead, Trump’s base was fueled by the very remarks that would, for a typical candidate, mark the end of their success. In January of 2016, Trump remarked on his own political infallibility at a rally in Iowa, telling crowds that he “could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue and shoot somebody and wouldn't lose voters.”⁷⁴ By disregarding political correctness, threatening his opponents, and rebuking political institutions, Trump exemplified to voters that he was prepared to disregard democratic norms in office in the same ways he regularly did on the campaign trail, and this made a difference to those who felt as though traditional democratic processes no longer served them.

These appeals to those who felt as though democracy no longer served them and to those who felt betrayed by political elites are prerequisites for the final populist tactic Bonikowski describes. This last strategy, and that which Bonikowski argues is most important, is that Trump appealed to an ethnically, racially, and culturally exclusive definition of American identity.⁷⁵ Trump capitalized on feelings of nostalgia for a United States of old, a nation that was more homogenous in a multitude of ways, and one that was more overtly oppressive towards racial minorities. Michael Kazin describes, those Americans who are most passionate about this

⁷³ "Trump Twitter Archive," *trumptwitterarchive.com*. Retrieved 8 October 2020.

⁷⁴ Sarah McCammon. “Donald Trump Has Brought On Countless Controversies In An Unlikely Campaign.” *NPR*, 5 Nov. 2016.

⁷⁵ Bart Bonikowski, “Trump’s Populism: The Mobilization of Nationalist Cleavages and the Future of U.S. Democracy,” 113.

conception of American identity as being convinced of the “nefarious alliance between evil forces on high and the unworthy, dark-skinned poor below— a cabal that imperils the interests and values of the patriotic (white) majority in the middle.”⁷⁶ Throughout his campaign, Trump frequently made racist, essentialist claims about a range of minority groups. One of his most well-known campaign promises was to build a border wall between the United States and Mexico, and he infamously insinuated that the wall was to keep out Mexicans who he considered to be drug-dealers, violent, and rapists.⁷⁷ Trump was not quiet about his perceived connections between the Islamic faith and terrorism, and much of his rise to political power stemmed from his 2011 interjection into politics when he actively promoted the conspiracy theory that Barack Obama was not born in the United States. Each of these claims rested on the very logic Kazin describes, that non-white members of American society are an intrinsic threat to white conceptions of American identity and that political elites unfairly collaborate with minority groups. Thus, Trumpism, while certainly a product of anti-elitism and a lack of regard for democratic norms, is fueled by nostalgia for a former racial nationalism. The vague slogan “Make America Great Again” harkens back to a time in which a very specific class of Americans— particularly white, working and middle class who perceive themselves as members of this liminal space between the corrupt elite above and undeserving poor below— were burdened less by political correctness, cosmopolitanism, and a globalized economy.

Trump’s opinions on minority groups were often portrayed under the guise of economic concerns. The day before the 2016 election Trump issued final remarks before voting commenced, and shared that the objective of his candidacy was to dismantle the “global power structure that is responsible for the economic decisions that have robbed our working class,

⁷⁶ Michael Kazin, "Trump and American Populism: Old Whine, New Bottles," 17.

⁷⁷ Jacob Pramuk, “What Trump Has Said about Mexico So Far in This Election.” *CNBC*, 31 Aug. 2016.

stripped our country of its wealth, and put that money into the pockets of a handful of large corporations and political entities.”⁷⁸ This framing of white disenfranchisement as economic disenfranchisement is not new. Juliet Hooker argues that this perception is fundamentally intertwined with the way white Americans conceive of citizenship. Historically, citizenship for white Americans provided “asymmetrical access to institutional political power vis-a-vis racial ‘others.’”⁷⁹ While many working-class white Americans have experienced tangible losses as economic inequality has skyrocketed, white expectations of political dominance lead to a hostility toward racial, ethnic, and religious minorities. As Hooker suggests, Trump’s campaign explicitly capitalized upon white economic grievances, and frequently drew connections between minority groups and the perceived economic losses of white Americans. By combining these three tactics, anti-elitism, disregard for democratic norms, and racial nationalism, Trump constructed the narratives that defined his campaign, narratives that tapped into deep resentment and anguish that have been brewing in white working- and middle-class Americans since before his entrance into the political arena.

A Recent History of Populism in the United States

Trump’s campaign playbook was not unique. Across the globe, and particularly in the United States and Europe, populist leaders increasingly utilize the very same tactics that Bonikowski details. Left- and right-wing populist leaders alike rely upon anti-elite rhetoric to appeal to voters. Yet, what sets right-wing populism apart from left-wing populism is the weaponization of nationalism and nativism for political gain.⁸⁰ This particular breed of populism

⁷⁸ Newburger, Emma, and Tucker Higgins, “Secretive Cabals, Fear of Immigrants and the Tea Party: How the Financial Crisis Led to the Rise of Donald Trump.” *CNBC*, 11 Sept. 2018.

⁷⁹ Juliet Hooker; “Black Protest / White Grievance: On the Problem of White Political Imaginations Not Shaped by Loss,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116:3 (July 2017): 486.

⁸⁰ Jeffrey Anderson and John C. Austin. “Why Rust Belts Matter Around the World,” *The City Club of Cleveland*, 6 Apr. 2021.

preys upon the disenfranchised and can often be exacerbated by long-standing feelings of disempowerment or frustration. Trump utilized narratives that tapped into feelings of deep resentment and anguish harbored by white working- and middle-class Americans, however many of the frustrations and feelings of disempowerment that fueled his success already existed in the United States.

Just a few years before the 2016 election, the Tea Party movement mobilized a sector of the United States' conservative electorate who expressed broad distaste with Republican discourse and American government as a whole. In many ways, the Tea Party can be considered a political precursor to Trump's success. This conservative, populist, social and political movement opposed taxation, government intervention in the private sector, and immigration.⁸¹ The Tea Party Movement did not define itself as a political party, as most Tea Party supporters actually identified as Republicans.⁸² Rather, the movement represented a shared set of values and ideas about how American government should look different. There was no national leader, but rather the movement consisted of a loose affiliation of thousands of chapters across the country. The rise of this new brand of Republican conservatism uncovered two particularly important strands of thought among Republican voters. First, most older, middle-class supporters of the Tea Party movement actually approved of social programs that Republicans characteristically aimed to dismantle and privatize, such as Medicare and Social Security. What they didn't approve of, however, were paying taxes that helped other sectors of American society, namely immigrants, people of low-income status, and young people.⁸³ While Tea Party supporters enjoyed reaping the benefits of government programs, they perceived other groups as less deserving of

⁸¹ "Tea Party Movement." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., www.britannica.com/topic/Tea-Party-movement.

⁸² Frank Newport, "Tea Party Supporters Overlap Republican Base." *Gallup*, 10 July 2010.

⁸³ Theda Skocpol, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (Oxford University Press, 2016): 7.

government aid and assistance. Many conservatives' opposition to federally-funded social programs was not rooted in their opposition to "big government" alone, but also rested upon conceptions of national identity, membership in the nation-state, and who deserved state assistance. The Tea Party movement relied on a historical, patriotic nationalism that had visceral meaning to those who felt they were losing their American identity.⁸⁴ At the same time as the establishment of the Tea Party movement, the United States had just elected its first Black president. For many Tea Party supporters, Barack Obama's promises to "transform America" signified the erosion of a historic brand of American identity, particularly white American identity. This individualistic, nationalistic sentiment continues to grow in the United States, and perhaps indicates that a reckoning with American identity and its historic linkages to race are required for democracy to move forward.

The second timely precursor to Trump that was exemplified by the peak years of the Tea Party movement was the disconnect between Republican elites and Republican voters. For Republican elites, the Tea Party provided political momentum that allowed them to fundraise and lobby for traditional Republican policy initiatives, such as deregulating business, providing tax cuts for wealthy Americans, and privatizing Social Security, healthcare, and many of the other government programs that supporters of the Tea Party movement actually favored.⁸⁵ Those at the grassroots level of the movement, such as Tea Party supporters who organized in their hometowns and online, seemed to have fundamentally different priorities than the national conservative advocacy organizations and prominent right-wing figures who joined the Tea Party. This was especially evident after the 2010 midterm elections, in which the momentum and activism of grassroots Tea Partiers delivered big electoral victories for the Republican party.⁸⁶ In

⁸⁴ Theda Skocpol, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, 7.

⁸⁵ Theda Skocpol, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, 7.

⁸⁶ Theda Skocpol, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, 9.

the period immediately following the midterm election, Republican elites utilized the momentum of the Tea Party with a new urgency and excitement. Many GOP congresspeople joined Tea Party caucuses, and a plethora of conservative advocacy groups claimed to speak on behalf of grassroots organizers.⁸⁷ The willingness of Republican elites to co-opt grassroots efforts for their own gain only furthered the divides within the party.

The Tea Party Movement uncovered characteristics of the Republican voter base that mirror the very characteristics that Donald Trump directly appealed to. This perceived erosion of white, patriotic American identity combined with hostility towards young people, immigrants, and Americans of color was clearly not a sentiment that rose and fell with the Tea Party. Similarly, for those who felt disconnected from elitism and establishment politicians, the willingness of the Republican Party to capitalize upon grassroots activism for personal gain only edified their dissatisfaction with elitism. While the Tea Party faded from the national spotlight in the earlier 2010s, the feelings it stirred in Americans did not evaporate, and were reignited by Trump's candidacy. On multiple occasions, Trump praised the Tea Party on the campaign trail, referring to supporters of the movement as "incredible people... who work hard and love their country and they get beat up all the time by the media."⁸⁸ Trump painted Tea Party supporters and disenfranchised voters in the very light they saw themselves, as genuine Americans who worked hard, yet were hustled by conventional Republicans and the media. The Tea Party movement uncovered critical cleavages in the Republican voter base and created a unique political space for those who felt left behind by contemporary politics, paving the way for Trump's success.

⁸⁷ Theda Skocpol, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, 9.

⁸⁸ MJ Lee, "Donald Trump Courts Tea Party at Nashville Straw Poll," *Cable News Network*, 29 Aug. 2015. www.cnn.com/2015/08/29/politics/donald-trump-tea-party-nashville/.

Partisan Structure

The success of Trump's populist strategies was advanced by preexisting sentiments of disenfranchisement and loss of national identity. However, his successful bid for the Republican nomination was not solely a product of exploiting this significant sector of the American electorate. Over the past few decades, the United States' two-party system has become increasingly polarized. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the United States was considered to have relatively weak political party association when compared with the partisan landscape in Europe.⁸⁹ However, the United States and Europe have swapped roles in this regard, and partisan identity is one of the most divisive, salient identities in contemporary American society. According to an analysis by Shanto Iyengar and Sean J. Westwood in the *American Journal of Political Science*, partisanship elicits the strongest feelings of ingroups and outgroups in the United States, and even surpasses race in this regard.⁹⁰ In recent years, partisan polarization has extended far beyond healthy political competition and has begun to exacerbate cultural rifts between Americans. These rifts are so extreme that politicians who do attempt to work across party lines risk backlash, criticism, or even electoral losses.⁹¹ Hostility across party lines, especially to such an intense degree, fundamentally opposes the democratic expectation that one views their opponent as legitimate.⁹² Political parties in the United States play a critical role in maintaining healthy democratic discourse. Yet, as polarization reaches dangerous, unsustainable

⁸⁹ Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (New York: Wiley, 1963).

⁹⁰ Shanto Iyengar and Sean J. Westwood, "Fear and Loathing Across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization," *American Journal of Political Science* 59:3 (2014): 690.

⁹¹ Shanto Iyengar and Sean J. Westwood, "Fear and Loathing Across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization," 690.

⁹² Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Broadway Books, 2019): 23.

levels, parties are more prone to foregoing their role as gatekeepers of democracy in exchange for maintaining power.

When Donald Trump entered the Republican nominating contest in 2015, he had many critics on both sides of the political aisle. Yet, as Trump closed in on the Republican nomination and eventually on the presidency, many of his Republican critics fell silent. The Republican party had arrived at a crossroads, a crossroads that extended until the final days of Trump's presidency and still plagues Republican discourse today. Once Trump became the nominee, the party was faced with two options. Their first option was to fracture over Trump. For some Republicans, anti-Trump sentiments were longstanding, and they considered his platform antithetical to both GOP values and to democracy. In March of 2016, almost two-dozen Republican leaders and activists gathered in Washington, D.C. to brainstorm how to avert a Trump nomination, or even a Trump presidency.⁹³ The conversation began by trying to find a "unity ticket," a candidate who Republicans could collectively rally behind in order to prevent Trump from achieving the nomination. Even as prominent party leaders like former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney and former George W. Bush adviser Bill Wichterman joined this movement, conservatives failed to leverage the party to reject Trump. Once Trump secured the GOP nomination, some Republican leaders tossed around the idea of supporting a third-party candidate, but this idea gained little traction.⁹⁴ The second option posed to the Republican party was to rally behind their nominee. While some members of the party embraced Trump, others simply turned a blind eye or offered half-hearted rebukes of him in moments of particularly obscene comments or policy propositions. On many occasions, he appalled his colleagues with his conduct.⁹⁵ Thus, those who

⁹³ Shane Goldmacher, et al. "Conservatives Call for 'Unity Ticket' to Stop Trump," *POLITICO*, 17 Mar. 2016.

⁹⁴ Shane Goldmacher, et al. "Conservatives Call for 'Unity Ticket' to Stop Trump."

⁹⁵ Yamiche Alcindor and Meredith Lee, "Trump's Path to the Presidency and the Remaking of the Republican Party," *Public Broadcasting Service*, 28 Aug. 2020.

disagreed with his policies or moral character could opt to rebuke him in private to preserve party unity and do their best to work with him to achieve policy goals. More often than not, this latter option prevailed. These Republicans occupied a space somewhere between Trump's loyal supporters and staunch opposition, attempting to distance themselves from Trump while still committed to seeing a Republican candidate advance to the White House. Robert Costa, political analyst for PBS News and reporter for the *Washington Post*, said that working with Trump "was for many of Republicans the bargain of a lifetime, but it will have consequences for years to come."⁹⁶ Essentially, Costa is referencing the failure of Republican leaders, particularly those who silently opposed Trump, to exercise their responsibility as gatekeepers. Choosing to stay silent in regard to Trump was a consciously chosen bargain, one many Republicans opted to make in order to maintain political power. Debates about the future of the Republican party are ongoing, and it is clear that the consequences of the Trump presidency on the party establishment are far from resolved.

Trump's speedy rise to power is a product of the unique structure of the United States' two-party system. By holding presidential primaries, parties can ensure that when election day comes, the entire institution can present a united front and rally behind one candidate. Yet, an idiosyncratic candidate like Trump emphasizes the potential flaws in this system. His campaign began through the support of independents and previous non-voters who were drawn to his denunciation of the political establishment, yet when he became the front-runner for the Republican party, he automatically won the support of almost every establishment Republican dedicated to advancing the party's policy agenda. This is a unique product of the two-party system, in which the either-or nature of political choices cultivates a mindset that denotes one's

⁹⁶ Yamiche Alcindor and Meredith Lee, "Trump's Path to the Presidency and the Remaking of the Republican Party."

opponents gains as their own losses, and vice versa. This model of political competition, the effects of which are compounded by extremely high levels of partisan polarization, allowed Trump to achieve power without adhering to democratic norms and to still receive his party's support. The magnitude of this partisan loyalty was exemplified throughout Trump's four years in office, with his party largely rallying behind him, or at least failing to denounce him, through both of his impeachment trials.

Trump's ascendancy from real estate mogul and reality TV star to president of the United States exemplifies the increasingly zero-sum nature of the United States' two-party system. Yet, Trump's electoral success and Trumpism are also indicative of a broad dissatisfaction with this very partisan structure. The either-or nature of the United States' two-party system has become widely unpopular among citizens, with over sixty-eight percent of Americans expressing desire for a third party as of 2018.⁹⁷ This sentiment has been developing for decades. In 1992, presidential candidate Ross Perot was one of the first precursors to the Tea Party, to contemporary American populism, and to Trump. He fractured the Republican party in the 1992 presidential election, running as a third-party candidate against Republican incumbent George H.W. Bush and Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton of the Democratic party. Perot received 18.9% of the popular vote, which remains to date the largest share of the popular vote won by a third-party candidate.⁹⁸ Many consider Perot's candidacy and unprecedented electoral success to have cost the Republican party the 1992 election, and analyses confirm that much of the support for Perot came from voters who previously supported Reagan and Bush.⁹⁹ In 1992, a large number of

⁹⁷ William A. Galston and Lee Drutman, "Spoiler Alert." *Democracy Fund Voter Study Group*, 26 Mar. 2018.

⁹⁸ "United States Presidential Election of 1992." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., www.britannica.com/event/United-States-presidential-election-of-1992.

⁹⁹ Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Significance of the 1992 Election." *Political Science and Politics* 26:1 (1993): 9.

Americans felt that the two major parties were too similar, and that regardless of which candidate won the race, the United States would head in the same general direction as a nation. Thus, many voters considered a vote for Perot to be a “protest vote,” an angry deviation from the mundane Republican-Democrat options and a broader outcry for more diversity in political thought.¹⁰⁰ A vote for Perot, for many Americans, was an act of dissent, ultimately conveying that Americans wanted their vote to carry more weight.

Widespread frustration with the lack of political options offered by the two-party system lingers today. The sentiments from the early nineties that the two political options are too similar has largely evaporated, however many Americans still indicate a desire for more political options. In a 2018 survey, sixty-eight percent of Americans reported that they believe the two parties are not doing an adequate job and they would like to see the emergence of a third party.¹⁰¹ What makes this political dissatisfaction even more noteworthy is that, as Americans have become increasingly unhappy with the two-party system, the two parties have become more ideologically distant than they have been in decades. On both sides of the spectrum, the share of partisans who view the opposing party in a “highly negative” light has more than doubled since 1994.¹⁰² More concerning, almost all of those who perceive the opposing party in such an extreme view believe that the other party is “so misguided that they threaten the nation’s well-being.”¹⁰³ While these statistics offer compelling information about dissatisfaction with the two-party system, they offer even more compelling insights in regard to the role of “the other” in American society. Not only do Americans simply disagree with their political adversaries, but they view their ideas and goals as a threat to the vitality of their own conception of nationhood. It

¹⁰⁰ Seymour Martin Lipset, “The Significance of the 1992 Election,” 9.

¹⁰¹ Galston, William A, and Lee Drutman. “Spoiler Alert.”

¹⁰² “Political Polarization in the American Public.” *Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy*, 12 June 2014.

¹⁰³ “Political Polarization in the American Public.”

is exceptionally dangerous for democracy when political parties begin to see the gains of their adversaries as their own losses. This systemic view of the partisan structure in the United States— a view that conceptualizes the success of others as at one’s own expense— mirrors the very phenomenon that is evident on the individual level when we consider those who are most responsive to populism.

In a representative democracy, alarm bells should start to go off when a large proportion of the public does not feel represented by existing political institutions. Perhaps this is why Trump performed so well in 2016, particularly in places where Americans feel overwhelmingly “left behind.” While a vote for Trump in 2016 may not have exemplified the frustration with the similarity of the two main parties that a vote for Perot did 1992, it may have exemplified a similar type of political dissatisfaction and disenfranchisement. Trump’s performance, particularly in Rust Belt America, is indicative of the fact that many people, particularly people in certain geographic regions of the United States, perceive themselves as inadequately represented and unheard in contemporary political discourse.

Geographic Analysis: Rust Belts in the United States

On an individual level, Trump strategically appealed to those who view the success of others as their own individual losses, particularly when these “others” do not fit their conceptions of American identity. A similar sentiment exists at the national level, as the two political parties in the U.S. view the other party as a threat to the nation’s well-being and to their own interests. Considering both of these statements, Trump’s success seemed to be propelled by those who view democracy in the United States as zero-sum, those who feel as though their own losses are always someone else’s gain. As economic inequality has risen to unprecedented levels in the

U.S. in recent years, this sentiment is particularly relevant to those who feel as though they are losing economically.

While the entirety of the United States has been subject to rising inequality, particular regions of the United States have been uniquely affected by rising inequality and changing economic infrastructure. Rust Belt cities and towns, most of which are concentrated in the Midwest and Northeast, are former manufacturing powerhouses that have gradually declined to become ghost towns of a bygone era of economic prosperity. Increasingly referred to as “legacy cities,” these areas are equipped with outdated infrastructure and economies and are struggling with the loss of a manufacturing sector that propelled many citizens into the middle class. Additionally, these cities are struggling to adapt to modern expectations of metropolitan centers, such as addressing climate change, tackling racial inequity, and ensuring that residents are digitally literate.¹⁰⁴ As the foundational economies of these cities and towns have declined, so too has population, property taxes, education, and other community assets. It is increasingly difficult for these areas to retain young people, and the challenges of “brain drain” contribute to local decline.¹⁰⁵ As manufacturing jobs have moved overseas, automation has increased, and steel and coal industries have declined, regions like the United States’ Rust Belt have developed across the globe.¹⁰⁶ Recently, scholars have begun to consider the role that these geographic regions play in the growing success of populist movements in liberal democracies worldwide.¹⁰⁷

The role of Rust Belt cities and towns played a unique role in the 2016 election of Donald Trump. Figure 1 displays the electoral results of the 2016 election, color coded by county.

Unsurprisingly, Trump was swept toward victory by a wave of votes from the nation’s rural

¹⁰⁴ Alan Mallach and Lavea Brachman, *Regenerating America's Legacy Cities*, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy (2013).

¹⁰⁵ Alan Mallach and Lavea Brachman, *Regenerating America's Legacy Cities*.

¹⁰⁶ Jeffrey Anderson and John C. Austin, “Why Rust Belts Matter Around the World.”

¹⁰⁷ Austin, John, et al. “How to (Finally) Defeat Populism.” *Foreign Policy*, 21 Dec. 2020.

population. Yet, this map doesn't look startlingly different from most other recent presidential elections, as the urban-rural divide in the United States notoriously aligns with the country's political divide. However, a careful analysis of the Midwest and Rust Belt regions convey a more nuanced explanation of Trump's narrow victory over Clinton. Figure 2 shows where Trump gained votes, lost votes, or maintained votes in comparison to Mitt Romney in 2012. With the exception of Florida, a swing state, and Texas, a historic Republican stronghold, every state in which Trump significantly outperformed Mitt Romney was a Rust Belt states, such as Pennsylvania, Michigan, New York, and Ohio. Not only did Trump simply outperform Mitt Romney in Rust Belt regions, But Hillary Clinton also underperformed in comparison to Barack Obama. Figure 3 visualizes Clinton's performance in comparison to Obama in the 2012 election. Virtually every state where Clinton underperformed fits into the geographic region of Rust Belt America, indicating that this is not solely a shift that evoked a new brand of Republican voters or increased turnout of nonvoters, but also that Trump spoke to Democratic voters, swing voters, and nonvoters in these regions.

Even though Clinton won the popular vote in 2016, Donald Trump surpassed Mitt Romney in popular votes by over two million.¹⁰⁸ Trump surpassed Romney by the greatest margins in Florida and New York, however Clinton also outperformed Obama in both of these states, perhaps indicating that turnout was simply higher in total. However, in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana, Trump outperformed Romney as Clinton also underperformed Obama.¹⁰⁹ In each of these Rust Belt states, Trump surpassed Romney by at least a 100,000-vote margin. Similarly, Clinton underperformed Obama by 100,000 votes or more in almost each one

¹⁰⁸ Hamdan Azhar, "2016 Vs. 2012: How Trump's Win and Clinton's Votes Stack Up to Romney And Obama." *Forbes*, 29 Dec. 2016.

¹⁰⁹ Hamdan Azhar, "2016 Vs. 2012: How Trump's Win and Clinton's Votes Stack Up to Romney And Obama."

of these states. In comparison to 2012, five states in the Rust Belt region flipped their support. Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania all were won by Obama in 2012, but all were won by Donald Trump in 2016.¹¹⁰ Only six states in total flipped from voting Democrat in 2012 to voting Republican in 2016, and five of these six states are located in the Rust Belt region. Without the support of these states, Donald Trump would not have won the 2016 election.

The results of the 2016 presidential election, particularly when compared to the results of the 2012 presidential election, cement the notion that Trump's rhetoric, while surely resonant across the United States, was most electorally powerful in Rust Belt cities and towns that are struggling to survive in our modern economy. The loss of manufacturing jobs, combined with the rise of economic inequality across the country, have resulted in many economic challenges for these geographic regions. The correlation between economic decline, particularly in areas that used to provide stable jobs that allowed access to the middle class, and support for Trump in 2016 indicates that populism is particularly resonant to those who have experienced or perceive that they have experienced economic losses. Notably, many Rust Belt cities and towns remain some of the United States' most racially segregated metropolitan areas.¹¹¹ As local economies have declined in these areas, support for a candidate who points blame at minority groups and revels in a historically white national identity skyrocketed. And while these sentiments have been brewing in America for a long time, perhaps Trump was wildly successful in certain geographic regions because, for the first time, a political candidate tied together feelings of economic, racial, and partisan displacement.

¹¹⁰ "2016 Presidential Election Interactive Map." 270toWin.Com, www.270towin.com/2016_Election/interactive_map.

¹¹¹ John C. Austin "Segregation and Changing Populations Shape Rust Belt's Politics." *Brookings*, 31 Jan. 2018.

Conclusion

While “unprecedented” has been a hallmark adjective used to describe Donald Trump, the ideology he promotes and tactics he has used to do so have simply tied together existing sentiments of disenfranchisement in the United States. Right-wing populism, at its core, relies upon appeals to identity and nationalism, and these appeals were in the foreground of forefront Trump’s campaign. Through his use of three campaign tactics— anti-elitism, disregard for democratic norms, and racial nationalism— Trump promulgated a narrative that appealed to many Americans who felt left behind and resentful. Not only did he speak to the fears of disenfranchised populations within the American electorate, but he also fostered a type of identity among these people, an identity that revolved around “patriotism,” nationalism, and outdated conceptions about what membership in the nation-state entails. Yet, while Trump may have uncovered these sentiments and cultivated a new identity between those who share these feelings, he did not create them. Appeals to identity, nationalism, and the disenfranchised are not new in the United States. The Tea Party movement uncovered some of the internal rifts within the Republican party that laid the groundwork for Trump. In the Tea Party era, the divides between Republican elites and Republican voters grew wider, perhaps making it easier for an antiestablishment candidate like Trump to overtake the party. Additionally, it became clear that identity and nationalism play a significant role in how Americans view the role of the state, and that people’s conceptions of who “deserves” government aid or robust government programs is closely tied to conceptions of racial nationalism. This has fostered a notion that one’s own access to resources relies upon these resources being denied to others, and that the success of others comes at one’s own expense.

This zero-sum culture of American politics that has become commonplace in recent years is also evident in partisan politics. The two-party system in the United States is coping with extreme partisan polarization. This polarization extends far beyond healthy political discourse, and many American's have begun to view the opposite political party as illegitimate, untrustworthy, and as having fundamentally different views about the direction of the United States as a nation. When polarization reaches such a high degree, the democratic norm that one's political opponents and adversaries are viewed as legitimate is often abandoned. When the opposing parties in the United States do not perceive one another as legitimate or as acting in the best interest of the United States, there is a greater incentive to forego the party's role as a gatekeeper in exchange for maintain one's political power. In the 2016 election, most members of the Republican party opted to support Trump, allowing him to achieve power without adhering to democratic norms and to still receive his party's support.

When considering the Rust Belt region of the United States, it becomes evident that many of the extreme sentiments evoked by Trump have a unique home where local economies are in steep decline. These Rust Belt regions are the drivers of Trump's electoral success and represent a desperate sector of American society. As living standards decline and the quality of community life diminishes, feelings of nostalgia, anger, and desperation are plentiful. Yet, these feelings are often accompanied by hostility towards groups such as immigrants and racial minorities. Trump's success in these regions, which looks astoundingly different from the success of Mitt Romney in 2012, makes it clear that Trumpism has a geographic center in the United States. The perceptions of economic insecurity and political voicelessness that Trump so easily capitalized upon is linked not only to local economic fallout, but also to the impression that those less deserving and less "American" are to blame for one's own economic and political woes. In

looking at the geographic trends of the 2016 election, it becomes clear that Trump drew connections between shifting economic systems, American identity and nationalism, and partisan structure that previous politicians had not. By cementing these three forms of disenfranchisement together in America's struggling regions, Trump received an outpouring of votes in geographic areas that carry immense electoral weight.

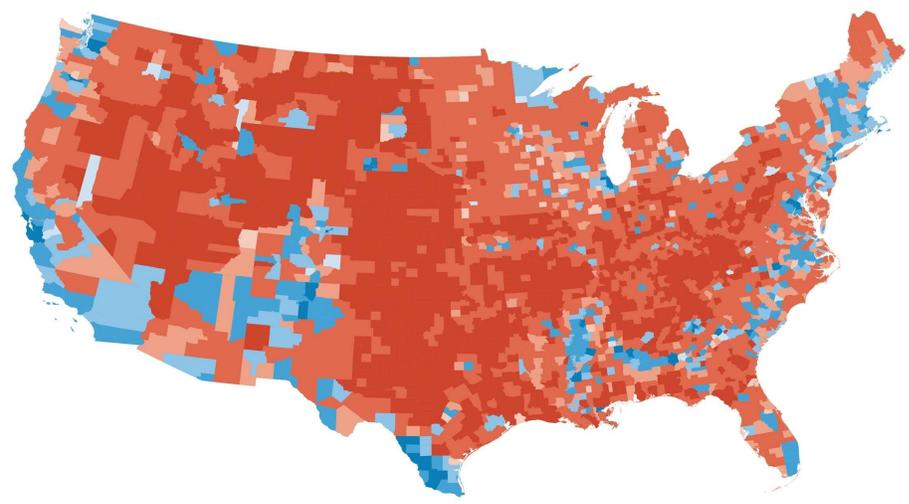
The philosophical foundations of democratic governance are antithetical to the hostile political culture that exists in the United States today. This zero-sum culture, which manifests in terms of national identity, partisan competition, and perception of economic status, fundamentally opposes the assumption that democracy is, in essence, a pursuit of the collective good. It is noteworthy that, as economic inequality has risen to unprecedented levels, Americans feel as though they have to compete with others for success, or even survival. While Trump's success cannot be pinned upon economic inequality— whether real or perceived— alone, his appeals have certainly been most resonant in geographic regions that have experienced severe economic deterioration. If the United States is to reckon with Trumpism and with populism, it seems as though it must also reckon with extreme inequality and reconnect American political culture to democratic culture.

Figure 1

2016 presidential election results by county

Data from U.S. Election Atlas.

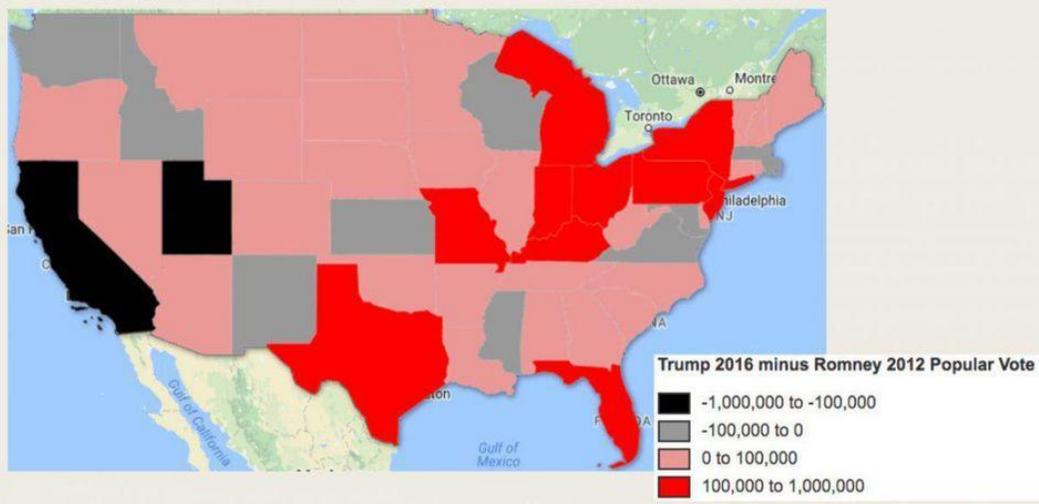
Clinton +50-100 +15-50 +2.1-15 +0-2.1 Trump +0-2.1 +2.1-15 +15-50 +50-100



Source: "2016 Presidential Election Results." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/president.

Figure 2

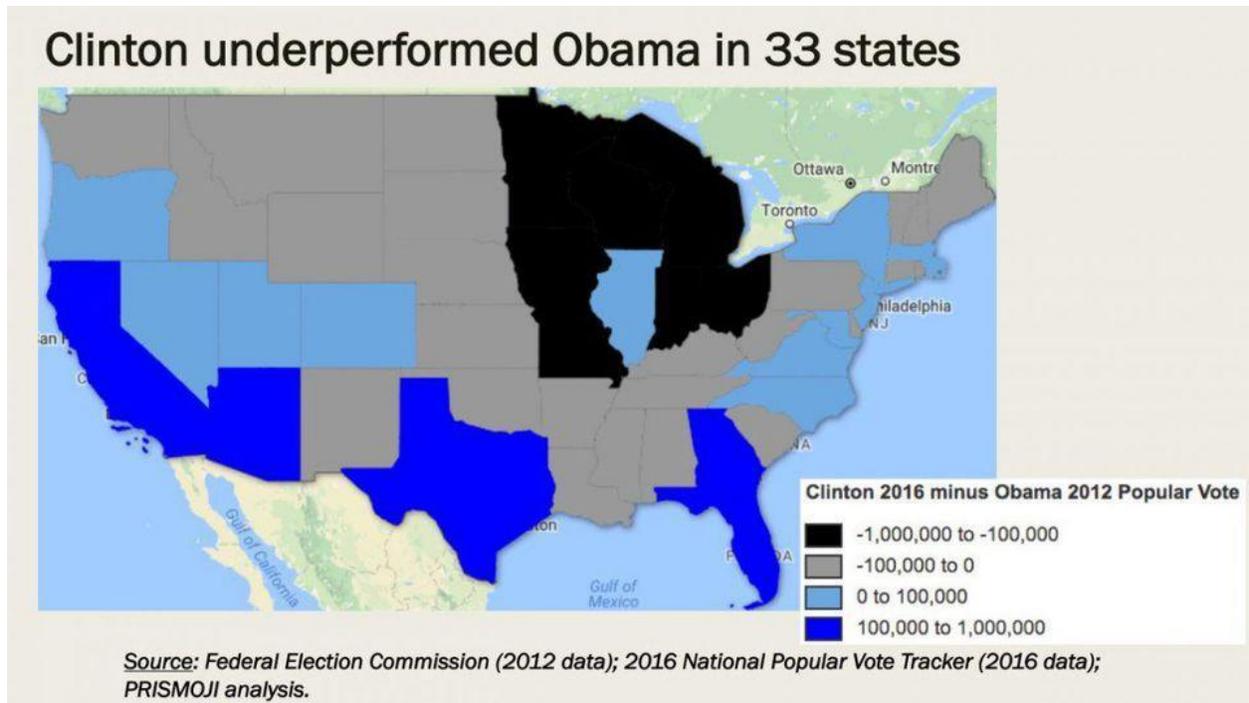
Trump got more votes than Romney 2012 in 38 states



Source: Federal Election Commission (2012 data); 2016 National Popular Vote Tracker (2016 data); PRISMOJI analysis.

Source: Hamdan Azhar, "2016 Vs. 2012: How Trump's Win And Clinton's Votes Stack Up To Romney And Obama." *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 29 Dec. 2016.
www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2016/12/29/2016-vs-2012-how-trumps-win-and-clintons-votes-stack-up-to-obama-and-romney/?sh=2f95a2a71661.

Figure 3



Source: Hamdan Azhar, "2016 Vs. 2012: How Trump's Win And Clinton's Votes Stack Up To Romney And Obama." *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 29 Dec. 2016.
www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2016/12/29/2016-vs-2012-how-trumps-win-and-clintons-votes-stack-up-to-obama-and-romney/?sh=2f95a2a71661.

Portuguese Democratization

Until 2019, Portugal was one of few European nations that had no prominent right-wing parties, and thus was viewed as an exception to the wave of right-wing populism affecting European democracies. Some have suggested that Portugal's resilience to the global surge of populism can be traced back to the nation's collective memory of the authoritarian regime that ruled less than fifty years ago.¹¹² Until the Carnation Revolution of 1974, Portugal was governed by an authoritarian military regime. This regime, the Estado Novo (New State), was formed in 1933 after a sixteen-year transitional period between the end of a constitutional monarchy and a failed attempt at democratization. António de Oliveira Salazar, a professor at the University of Coimbra, was appointed prime minister of the regime by president Óscar Carmona. Once in office as prime minister, Salazar created a new constitution that formally established the Estado Novo.¹¹³ Salazar created a regime that was governed by corporatism, conservatism, nationalism, and the Portuguese ideology of *lusotropicalism*. Lusotropicalism is used to describe the strand of thought that attempted to justify Portugal's vast colonial empire, particularly the maintenance of this empire long after many other imperial powers began to relinquish control of their colonial territories. This term is used to describe the thoughts shared by Portuguese people that the Portuguese were more humane, friendly, and adaptable colonizers, and thus that Portuguese colonization is distinct from other forms of imperialism.¹¹⁴ The Salazar regime was governed by a desire to maintain Portugal's colonial expanse, as well as maintain the state's deep connection

¹¹² Mariana S. Mendes, "The Rise of Chega and the End of Portuguese Exceptionalism." *The London School of Economics and Political Science*, 21 January 2021.

¹¹³ Kenneth Maxwell, *The Making of Portuguese Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 16.

¹¹⁴ Joaquim Pires Valentim and Ana Maria Heleno, "Lusotropicalism as a Social Representation in Portuguese Society: Variations and Anchoring," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* (Pergamon, 2017), 34.

to the Catholic church. While Salazar attempted to distance himself from other European fascist regimes, particularly Mussolini and Hitler, the Estado Novo had little regard for human rights and civil liberties. Tom Gallagher described the police state established by the Estado Novo as developing a regime of “low-key terror.”¹¹⁵ Similar to the ideas produced by lusotropicalist thinking, the Salazar regime attempted to portray itself as “better” than other European fascist regimes and thought the stability of the Estado Novo was beneficial for Portugal.

Much of the “low-key terror” created by the Estado Novo regime was produced through the establishment of a secret police force called the *Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado* (International and State Defense Police). The primary function of the *Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado* (PIDE) was to prevent, rather than contain, unrest and anti-regime activity.¹¹⁶ Strict censorship was introduced at the start of the regime, political parties were abolished, and those suspected of organizing in opposition to the military were jailed, exiled, or killed by the state. The PIDE was composed of a network of over twenty thousand spies and informers strategically placed around the country in cafes, hospitals, public transit, factories, and other places.¹¹⁷ By maintaining political obedience, the PIDE also ensured that Portuguese citizens could not rebel against the economic structures imposed by the Estado Novo. The Salazar regime forbade trade unions, restricted international business, and kept taxes low. This allowed those at the top of the economic pyramid to profit immensely, and by the 1960s it is estimated that about twenty families controlled the majority of Portugal’s wealth.¹¹⁸ These families owned many of the business conglomerates that were the foundations of Portugal's corporatist system. About halfway through Salazar’s rule, he adopted a slightly more outward-looking economic policy. As

¹¹⁵ Tom Gallagher, "Controlled Repression in Salazar's Portugal." *Journal of Contemporary History* 14, no. 3 (1979), 386.

¹¹⁶ Tom Gallagher, "Controlled Repression in Salazar's Portugal," 386.

¹¹⁷ Tom Gallagher, "Controlled Repression in Salazar's Portugal," 387.

¹¹⁸ Tom Gallagher, "Controlled Repression in Salazar's Portugal," 392.

much of Europe began to rebuild after World War II, Portugal joined in many of the economic collaboratives that were a product of European integration. Portugal participated in the creation of the European Free Trade Association in 1960 and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 1961. In the early 1960s, Portugal also became a member of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank.¹¹⁹ When Salazar came to power, Portugal's GDP was around thirty-eight percent of the average GDP of European countries. Just before the Estado Novo fell in 1974, this number had risen to fifty-six percent.¹²⁰ While inequality was catastrophic under the Estado Novo, Salazar's economic programs did vastly increase Portugal's economic output and standards of living. For this reason, some Portuguese people shared the lusotropicalist ideology about Salazar, that he was a relatively "good" dictator. Contrary to this thought, Portugal remained one of the poorest countries in Europe throughout the entire regime and had extremely high rates of poverty and illiteracy.¹²¹ The regime's attempt to convince the public of its good-naturedness was only partially effective; however, some Portuguese citizens still tend to view the Estado Novo through a rose-tinted lens.

The post-war era brought Portugal, which avoided the devastation of the war, much economic prosperity and a new relationship with Europe. However, the 1960s were an era of crisis for the Salazar regime. Salazar himself suffered from a fall that left him with a cerebral hemorrhage, and he was replaced by Marcelo Caetano who ruled for the final years of the Estado Novo. Guerilla movements emerged in three of Portugal's colonial territories: Angola,

¹¹⁹ José Mattoso and Fernando Rosas, *História De Portugal* (Editorial Estampa, 1994), 474.

¹²⁰ Joaquim da Costa Leite, "Instituições, Gestão e Crescimento Económico: Portugal, 1950-1973," *Departamento de Economia, Gestão e Engenharia Industrial* (Universidade de Aveiro, Working Papers de Economia, 2006).

¹²¹ Guy Neave and Alberto Amaral, "The Nation, A Generation and Higher Education, Portugal 1974–2009" (*Springer Science & Business Media*, 2011), 95.

Mozambique, and Guinea. The Colonial War (known as the War of Liberation in former colonial territories) lasted for around ten years and took a massive economic toll on Portugal. Not only did the war have immense costs, but the mandatory conscription of many young men severely impacted the workforce.¹²² After about a decade of this financially draining war and almost four decades of the Estado Novo, political discontent was at an all-time high. The Movimento das Forças Armadas (Armed Forces Movement) was a group of pro-democracy military personnel, and this group became the organizing force behind the Carnation Revolution. In April of 1974, this militia group planned a coup to overthrow the Estado Novo, and were the first group of revolutionaries who were able to evade intervention from PIDE. On April 25th, the Movimento das Forças Armadas (MFA) used coordinated radio signals to stage a coup that would overthrow the regime. By strategically playing certain songs over the radio, the MFA were able to dismantle the regime in pieces. The playing of certain songs indicated when parts of the government had conceded and the next operation could occur.¹²³ Although the militia repeatedly requested over radio that the public stay home, thousands of Portuguese citizens took to the streets to join the coup. Carnations were in season, and the flowers were being sold by street vendors across Lisbon. To communicate that the coup was intended to be nonviolent, members of the military stuffed the flowers into the barrels of their guns, giving the revolution its name. About six hours after the first radio signal, the government ceded power to the people. The entire process was almost completely bloodless and is one of few successful nonviolent military coups in history.¹²⁴

After the events of April 25th, Portugal entered into a transitional period while the new democracy attempted to find its footing. All of Portugal's colonial territories were liberated, and the military insurgents attempted to maintain order while the country organized its new political

¹²² Kenneth Maxwell, *The Making of Portuguese Democracy*, 36.

¹²³ Kenneth Maxwell, *The Making of Portuguese Democracy*, 35.

¹²⁴ Kenneth Maxwell, *The Making of Portuguese Democracy*, 58.

system. Economically drained and without leadership, this was a particularly difficult period of time for Portugal. The Carnation Revolution was the spark that set forth the third wave of democratization, so Portugal had little direction on how to democratize.¹²⁵ The Estado Novo had banned the existence of political parties and the PIDE ensured that political organizations did not exist underground, so the formation of political parties and interest groups was time consuming. Any individuals associated with the Estado Novo were barred from membership in these organizations, and thus many of the leaders of these new institutions were inexperienced. However, on April 25th, 1975, exactly one year after the coup, the Portuguese Republic held its first democratic election. Voter turnout exceeded ninety-one percent, and the two political parties that emerged with the most seats in the legislature are the two most popular political parties in Portugal to date.¹²⁶

Today, the 25th of April is a national celebration in Portugal that marks the country's commitment to democracy. It became evident quickly after the revolution that the majority of Portuguese citizens were much happier with their new system of government than they were under the Estado Novo. By 1985, just ten years after the country's first democratic election, only thirteen percent of Portuguese citizens retained a positive opinion of the authoritarian regime.¹²⁷ A similar survey was conducted thirty years after Portugal democratized, and these sentiments remained virtually the same. Young people are among the most attached to democracy in Portugal and the proudest of the Carnation Revolution, which bodes well for the future of Portuguese democracy and breaks with international trends of young people being increasingly

¹²⁵ António Costa Pinto, "Authoritarian Legacies, Transitional Justice and State Crisis in Portugal's Democratization." *Democratization*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2006), 175.

¹²⁶ Kenneth Maxwell, *The Making of Portuguese Democracy*, 149.

¹²⁷ António Costa Pinto, "Authoritarian Legacies, Transitional Justice and State Crisis in Portugal's Democratization," 196.

ambivalent towards democracy as a system of governance.¹²⁸ Many scholars have hypothesized that Portugal has been relatively immune to populist discourse because of the collective memory of authoritarianism. However, the past fifteen years of Portuguese history have been characterized by extreme economic hardships, as the country struggled through the 2008 global financial crisis, entered a domestic financial crisis in the early 2010s, and has had most economic recovery upended by the global financial crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic. In this era of prolonged economic hardship, a small number of Portuguese citizens seem to be slightly nostalgic for the stability of the Salazar regime. The notion that Salazar was a “good” or “better” dictator informs this rhetoric, which perhaps weakens some Portuguese people’s opposition to borderline authoritarian politics, such as the recent rise of the far-right across Europe. While this portion of the population is small, the success of right-wing party leader André Ventura has prompted questions about Portugal’s resilience towards populism.

Portugal Case Analysis

As right-wing populism has taken off across Europe, threatening traditional political parties and norms of democratic governance, Portugal has historically been viewed as an exception. The nation boasts high levels of confidence in the European Union, low immigration rates in comparison to its neighbors, a multi-party legislative structure that requires partisan cooperation and coalition-building.¹²⁹ In addition, the collective memory of the authoritarian

¹²⁸ António Costa Pinto, “Authoritarian Legacies, Transitional Justice and State Crisis in Portugal's Democratization.” 196.

¹²⁹ Roberto Quintas da Silva, “A Portuguese Exception to Right-Wing Populism,” 2.

Estado Novo regime has made most Portuguese citizens wary of far-right politics.¹³⁰ Until recently, these factors appeared to have fortified Portugal against the threat of populism. Yet, Portugal is now attempting to manage the rise of André Ventura, leader of the far-right party Chega. Ventura began his political journey by creating the Chega party in 2019, a self-identified right-wing populist, socially and politically conservative party. The remarkable rise of Chega since its founding in 2019 has prompted many to reconsider Portugal's status as an exception to populism and has uncovered aspects of Portuguese political culture that can begin to explain why Portugal is no longer an exception to the populist surge occurring across the globe.

André Ventura, a former sportscaster, television host, and law professor first entered the political scene in 2017 as a member of the center right Partido Socialista Democrata (Social Democratic Party). Ventura ran for office in the Lisbon suburb of Loures, where he unsuccessfully campaigned for mayor. However, Ventura's mayoral campaign granted him name recognition throughout Lisbon. He became notorious for his brash, unconventional statements, particularly those regarding immigration policy and minority groups in Portugal.¹³¹ Ventura's charisma and years as a television personality allowed him to maintain media coverage and political momentum after the election, and by 2019 Ventura had formed his own political party. He ran for election again in 2019 under his newly created party entitled Chega, which translates to "enough." The name Chega implies the party's commitment to ending corruption in Portuguese politics, indicating that the Portuguese people have had "enough." In the 2019 Portuguese legislative election, Chega won one out of forty-eight seats in his district, the largest

¹³⁰ Salgado, Susana, "Where's Populism? Online Media and the Diffusion of Populist Discourses and Styles in Portugal."

¹³¹ Colm Quinn and Katie Livingstone, "Was Portugal's Election a Breakthrough for the Far-Right?" *Foreign Policy* (2021).

district in the country and the same district that represents the capital city of Lisbon. Since 2019, Ventura has served as one of two hundred and forty total members of the Assembleia da República, and the only representative from Chega.

In early 2020, after serving not even one complete term in the Assembleia da República, Ventura announced his candidacy for the 2021 presidential election. In his campaign announcement, Ventura framed his quest for the presidency as a fight against both incumbent Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa and “the system” that he defends, referring to Portuguese political establishment.¹³² Rebelo de Sousa, nicknamed the “President of Affections” and known simply by the name “Marcelo” to Portuguese citizens, is somewhat of a political anomaly himself. According to the Democracy Perception Index, Portuguese citizens are the third most skeptical of their democracy in the world.¹³³ This high rate of skepticism would presumably bode well for anti-establishment candidates like Ventura, yet Rebelo de Sousa has boasted considerably high approval ratings through his term. He is famous for his amicability and is known for taking selfies on the street with Portuguese citizens and tourists alike. Although he had political challengers in the 2021 presidential election, it was a common expectation among the Portuguese public that Rebelo de Sousa would be reelected. As predicted, Rebelo de Sousa was elected for a second term in January 2021, and won by the third-largest margin in Portuguese democratic history.¹³⁴ While Rebelo de Sousa’s victory was unsurprising, the election set off alarm bells in another regard. Ventura— who received just over one percent of his district’s vote in 2019 in his election to the Assembleia da República— came in third in the presidential election and obtained

¹³² “André Ventura Anuncia Candidatura à Presidência Da República,” *Diário De Notícias*, February 8, 2020.

¹³³ “Distrust in Government: Portuguese Rank 3rd Most Skeptical in the World.” *Portugal Resident*, June 27, 2019.

¹³⁴ João Pedro Barros, “Presidenciais Distrito a Distrito: Marcelo Ganha Em Todos, Ventura é ‘Vice’ Em 12 (Mas Ana Gomes Fica à Frente Em Lisboa e No Porto).” *Jornal Expresso*, January 25, 2021.

almost twelve percent of the national vote. The candidate who came in second polled just under thirteen percent of the national vote.¹³⁵ Ventura's quick rise from small party leader with one seat in the legislature to becoming the third most prominent party in the nation shocked many and indicated that Portugal is no longer the European exception to right-wing populism it was once thought to be.

Ventura and Populist Tactics

While Ventura's populist tactics are new to the Portuguese political landscape, his rise to power has been strikingly similar to other right-wing leaders across the globe and he has often been compared to President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil and former United States President Donald Trump. Bart Bonikowski lays out three hallmark tactics of right-wing populists, and Ventura has utilized each of these throughout his campaign. First, Bonikowski notes that populism is fundamentally anti-elitist, and that the essence of populist political thought relies upon distinguishing the moral people from the corrupt elite.¹³⁶ Ventura, when asked by a journalist to describe why he founded Chega, responded that all existing political parties in Portugal "are part of the system, which implies that they are more concerned with their political and personal survival than with solving the problems of the Portuguese."¹³⁷ Portuguese establishment leaders, he argues, are a group of old cronies who fuel government corruption by acting only in their own self-interest. Ventura paints himself as the exact opposite, as a young, charismatic, and innovative voice that will restore power to the Portuguese people.

¹³⁵ Raphael Minder "Portugal's President Wins Re-Election, but Far Right Gains." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, January 25, 2021.

¹³⁶ Bart Bonikowski, "Trump's Populism: The Mobilization of Nationalist Cleavages and the Future of U.S. Democracy," 111.

¹³⁷ Iolanda Fonseca, "Portugal's André Ventura Rattles Political Elite." *Rio Times*, February 14, 2021.

The second common populist tactic that Ventura uses involves utilizing anti-elitism to sow distrust not only in political parties and politicians, but in systems of government as a whole. Ventura advocates that Portuguese government is so corrupt that it requires a fundamental restructuring. He has repeatedly indicated that socialism and corruption are eroding Portuguese society, and frequently laments Portugal's robust welfare state. Often, Ventura portrays those who utilize national welfare as lazy and undeserving and has said that "half of the country works to pay for those who do not want to work."¹³⁸ Not only does Ventura criticize existing political systems, but he has also proposed eliminating existing political institutions entirely in exchange for what he calls the "Fourth Republic." This radical proposal includes creating an entirely new constitution, switching Portugal's semi-presidential system to a presidential system, and drastically minimizing the number of seats in the legislature.¹³⁹ In Portugal, where seventy-one percent of citizens feel the government "rarely" or "never" acts in their interests, Ventura's anti-establishment rhetoric is particularly powerful.¹⁴⁰

Lastly, Bonikowski argues that populist rhetoric often hinges upon appeals to culturally, racially, and ethnically exclusive conceptions of national identity. In order to define who is part of the "moral" people and who is part of the "corrupt" elite, populist leaders usually rely on national identity. Ventura has declared his allegiance only to certain sectors of the Portuguese citizenry and proclaimed during his presidential campaign that he does not seek to serve all of Portugal, but rather only the "*Portugueses de bem*," or the good, decent Portuguese people.¹⁴¹

While he has never explicitly defined who the "Portugueses de bem" consists of, his views on

¹³⁸ "André Ventura Manda 'Trabalhar' Ciganos e Antifascistas." *Jornal De Negócios*, January 10, 2021.

¹³⁹ Mariana S. Mendes, "The Rise of Chega and the End of Portuguese Exceptionalism."

¹⁴⁰ "Distrust in Government: Portuguese Rank 3rd Most Skeptical in the World." *Portugal Resident*, June 27, 2019.

¹⁴¹ Bianca Marques, "'André Ventura é o Presidente dos Portugueses De Bem' Matteo Salvini Expressa Apoio Ao Líder Do Chega," *Jornal Económico*, January 22, 2021.

immigration and racial and ethnic minorities do not make it difficult to infer. In alignment with other European far-right parties, Chega is strongly anti-immigrant, and Ventura himself has made openly discriminatory remarks toward many minority groups, but particularly toward Roma peoples. As the United States held Black Lives Matter protests in cities across the country in the summer of 2020, Portugal and many other European nations rallied to show solidarity with those protesting in the United States, but also to acknowledge their own country's issues with police brutality and racism. In response to these protests, Ventura organized "*Portugal não é racista*" (Portugal is not racist) marches. At one of these rallies, Ventura promised that Chega will protest every time the "extreme left" attempts to talk about racism in the political sphere.¹⁴² While Ventura attempts to evoke the same forms of racial nationalism as Trump and Bolsonaro, he is significantly less successful. Much of this is simply due to conditions in Portugal that do not mirror those of other states that are experiencing populist movements. For example, Portugal has immigration rates lower than most other European nations, accepts fewer refugees, and is more ethnically homogenous. The Roma people, who are the most frequently targeted by Ventura, represent less than half of one percent of the Portuguese population.¹⁴³ Mariana S. Mendes notes that, contrary to most other European nations and the United States, nationalism plays a much smaller role in Ventura's platform. While it surely is still a component of his platform and persona, Ventura relies much more heavily upon his appeals to anti-establishment thought and political corruption.¹⁴⁴

Recent History of Populism in Portugal

¹⁴² "Chega Manifestou-Se Em Lisboa Para Dizer Que 'Portugal Não é Racista.'" *Observador*, August 2, 2020.

¹⁴³ Luis Gouveia, "What Portugal Can Teach Us about the Far Right," *OpenDemocracy*, March 5, 2021.

¹⁴⁴ Mariana S. Mendes, "The Rise of Chega and the End of Portuguese Exceptionalism."

Prior to Ventura's creation of Chega, the radical right remained fairly quiet in Portugal and when it did make an appearance in politics, populism remained on the fringes of political discourse. In the first few years after the fall of the Estado Novo, existing right-wing groups attempted to establish themselves in the new democracy. Yet, these groups were divided into various nationalist factions, and failed to coalesce into one cohesive force.¹⁴⁵ When these groups, usually composed of people who longed to return to the Salazar regime, did seem to gain some political momentum, they were often quickly shut down by the military. The military, who led the Carnation Revolution and organized the coup that resulted in Portugal's transition to democracy, reacted with incredible speed to perceived counter-democracy movements. By the early 2000s, these often-silenced groups began to advocate for increased political power, particularly as far-right groups began to emerge across Europe. Right-wing populism has existed throughout Portuguese democratic history but has almost always failed to gain widespread support.

The disjointed far-right groups that were present at the outset of Portuguese democratization eventually, in the early 2000s, formed the Partido Nacional Renovador (PNR), which translates to the National Renewal Party.¹⁴⁶ The PNR adopted traditional radical right discourse; they were strongly anti-immigrant, skeptical of the European Union for both cultural and economic reasons, aligned with the Catholic Church on issues regarding homosexuality and abortion, and advocated for reform of the Portuguese state.¹⁴⁷ Although the PNR has never gained enough votes to win a seat in parliament, they have remained a constant yet minimally

¹⁴⁵ Riccardo Marchi, *Portuguese Far Right: Between Late Authoritarianism and Democracy (1945-2015)*, (Routledge, 2020), 133.

¹⁴⁶ Roberto Quintas da Silva, "A Portuguese Exception to Right-Wing Populism," *Palgrave Commun* 4, 7 (2018), 2.

¹⁴⁷ Marchi, *Portuguese Far Right: Between Late Authoritarianism and Democracy (1945-2015)*, 143-145.

influential party in Portuguese politics. The party saw substantial decline throughout the financial crises, and only received about half of one percent of the popular vote in the 2015 parliamentary elections.¹⁴⁸ By early 2019, it was perceived that the platforms of both PNR and the newly formed Chega were falling on deaf ears.¹⁴⁹ Far-right populism, it seemed, did not have a place in Portuguese politics.

Just months later, Chega gained enough votes to capture a single seat in parliament, and about a year-and-a half later is considered by some to be Portugal's third-largest political party. PNR and Chega, while governed by many of the same ideological principles, utilize very different approaches to state reform and corruption. PNR never bridged internal divides about how the party should approach government corruption. Thus, addressing corruption always was a point of interest for the party, but they never established clear objectives on how exactly to accomplish this goal. While the PNR failed to appeal to voters in this regard, the party remained attractive to some because of their outward anti-immigrant views and Euroscepticism.¹⁵⁰ Chega, on the other hand, offers a version of right-wing populism that is anti-immigrant and somewhat Eurosceptical, but heavily emphasizes their commitment to addressing corruption. Perhaps this shift in priorities can begin to explain why Chega has been so successful while parties like PNR have failed in Portugal.

Rodrigo Quintas da Silva offers a few hypotheses that suggest why, in the past, Portuguese citizens have not supported populist parties. He suggests that immigration rates in Europe are comparatively low, Euroscepticism is also low in comparison to other countries, and

¹⁴⁸ Ministério da Administração Interna (2015) Legislativas 2015: Resultados globais. <http://www.eleicoes.mai.gov.pt/legislativas2015>. Accessed April 26, 2021.

¹⁴⁹ Catarina Demyon, "Europe's Loneliest Far-Right Party Losing Election Battle in Portugal." *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, September 30, 2019.

¹⁵⁰ Ralf Melzer and Sebastian Serafin, *Right-Wing Extremism in Europe: Country Analyses, Counter-Strategies and Labor-Market Oriented Exit Strategies*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Forum Berlin (2013), 133.

that the Salazar regime is too fresh in national memory for many Portuguese people to take borderline authoritarian politics seriously.¹⁵¹ PNR based its electoral platform on both restricting immigration and Euroscepticism, which are political opinions that are present in Portugal, but in a very minimal capacity. In addition, the foundations of the PNR were built by those who were pro-Salazar, thus much of the Portuguese public who fears a return to authoritarianism has been fearful of the PNR. Chega, on the other hand, utilizes populist rhetoric in ways that avoid these very aspects that are perceived as off-putting by Portuguese people. Chega is anti-immigrant, but these sentiments are hardly the governing force of their political manifesto. Ventura's success has been driven by his spite for the political establishment, and his detailed plans to completely recreate the Portuguese political system. While Ventura has expressed interest in minimizing Portugal's involvement in the European Union, he still believes that the EU is an asset to Portugal and does not want to withdraw.¹⁵² Although many of Ventura's comments and policy goals are borderline authoritarian— completely restructuring the government, for example— the party has never been affiliated with the Salazar regime in the way that PNR has been. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, Ventura has managed to sidestep almost every cultural barrier to populism that has existed in Portugal during the republic's fifty-year democratic history.

Partisan Structure

After Portugal democratized in the 1970s, the new government restructured to become a semi-presidential republic with a multi-party system. There are over twenty political parties that are formally recognized in Portugal, however two parties have dominated the political landscape since 1974, and only about eight parties usually win representation in the Assembleia da

¹⁵¹ Roberto Quintas da Silva, "A Portuguese Exception to Right-Wing Populism," 2.

¹⁵² Henrique Burnay, "Um Problema à Distância." *DN*, Diário De Notícias, January 25, 2021.

República per election cycle.¹⁵³ The center-left Partido Socialista (Socialist Party) and the center-right Partido Social Democrata (Social Democrat Party) control most seats, and these two groups have swapped power for over forty years.¹⁵⁴ Throughout the past four decades, most Portuguese citizens have felt adequately represented by these two parties, and their stability and consistency have been a defining characteristic of the Portuguese political system. Until the rise of Chega in 2019, Portugal had not seen the emergence of a party that could potentially destabilize the Partido Social Democrata (PSD) and Partido Socialista (PS).¹⁵⁵

The political stability of Portugal's two dominant parties began to falter in 2019, when the right suffered big losses in the parliamentary elections. The PSD had been experiencing a decline in support since the onset of the Portuguese financial crisis, which began around 2010 and peaked in 2014.¹⁵⁶ Until recently, the PSD had avoided any affiliation with Chega, rejected every attempt from the party to form agreements or coalitions, and even referred to the party as being "incompatible" with democratic principles.¹⁵⁷ However, these sentiments were quickly pushed under the rug in 2020 when, after twenty-four years, the PS lost its majority in the regional government of the Azores, an autonomous island region in the Atlantic Ocean. The Azores, combined with the autonomous island of Madeira and mainland Portugal, form the whole of the Portuguese Republic. The Partido Social Democrata, looking to finally regain political control of the Azores, asked Chega to join a coalition of five other parties. By incorporating the two members of parliament in the Azores who represent Chega, the coalition

¹⁵³ "TRIBUNAL CONSTITUCIONAL Portugal." *Partidos Registados e Suas Denominações, Siglas e Símbolos*, Accessed 25 April, 2021.

¹⁵⁴ Roberto Quintas da Silva, "A Portuguese Exception to Right-Wing Populism," 3.

¹⁵⁵ Fabian Figueiredo, "Chega: The Worst of the Portuguese System Now Has a Party." *European Left*, February 24, 2021.

¹⁵⁶ Ricardo Reis. "The Portuguese Slump and Crash and the Euro Crisis." *Brookings*, Brookings, September 13, 2016.

¹⁵⁷ Figueiredo, "Chega: The Worst of the Portuguese System Now Has a Party."

would narrowly tip the scales away from the socialists.¹⁵⁸ Two of the smaller parties in the coalition, the People's Party and Pessoas-Animais-Natureza (People-Animals-Nature), expressed hesitancy towards including Chega, and made clear that their membership in the coalition was contingent upon a commitment to reject any of Chega's politically incorrect policy objectives.

The Partido Social Democrata's decision to break with their past behavior of ostracizing Chega in order to unseat the socialists created two important consequences for Portugal's partisan landscape. First, much of Portugal's former insulation against far-right ideologies has been attributed to the country's short democratic history. For many Portuguese citizens, the Salazar regime is fresh in national memory, and parties like Chega are quickly rejected by a vast majority of citizens when they appeal to Salazar-era political tactics, such as proposing a new Portuguese constitution. When mainstream parties refuse to affiliate with these groups, they reinforce to the public that these parties are illegitimate and a threat to democracy. However, when the Partido Social Democrata decided to form a coalition with Chega in the Azores, it sent a message to many voters on the right that Chega was legitimate. In *How Democracies Die*, Levitsky and Ziblatt note that "the erosion of mutual toleration may motivate politicians to deploy their institutional powers as broadly as they can get away with."¹⁵⁹ By deploying the institutional power of coalition-building with Chega, the PSD abandoned its role as a gatekeeper in Portuguese politics and allowed an undemocratic party to become legitimized among the people.

Second, While the PSD's collaboration with Chega was intended to strengthen the force of the political right in the Azores, it actually caused many traditional PSD voters to abandon the party for Chega. Many voters on the right have been dissatisfied with the PSD since the financial

¹⁵⁸ Natasha Donn, "Right-Wing Chega Poised to Tip Teetering Socialist 'Balance' in Azores." *Portugal Resident*, November 3, 2020.

¹⁵⁹ Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, 114.

crisis, and Ventura's appeals to the politically dissatisfied, combined with the legitimization of his party by establishment right wing forces, won him many votes from traditional PSD supporters.¹⁶⁰ Even though Ventura created Chega because of his personal dissatisfaction with the PSD, he has made clear that he is willing to collaborate with the PSD if it means the socialists will lose power. In other European nations, right-wing populism was viewed as a serious threat when populist parties threatened the existing prominent parties. The strength of the PSD and PS have traditionally been viewed as a quality of the Portuguese political system that have protected Portugal from populism. The acceptance of Chega by the PSD indicated that the party was willing to threaten the existing political order and risk Chega's success in order to see the defeat of their political opponents. While it may be too soon to say that Portugal has become a state in which populist parties are threatening existing parties, many are anticipating the 2022 parliamentary election to truly assess just how popular Chega has become and whether the party's popularity poses a serious threat to the forty-year balance between the PSD and the PS.

Two of the most important qualities that have protected Portugal from populism have been the nation's collective memory of the Salazar regime, and the success of the two mainstream parties. Yet, the PSD's choice to collaborate with Chega in the Azores effectively removed both of these barriers to populist success in Portugal. By openly collaborating with Chega, the PSD signaled to Portuguese citizens that the party is trustworthy and dissolved the skepticism of some who were wary of Chega because of the party's borderline authoritarian policies. By endorsing Chega in an attempt to oust the socialists from power, the PSD not only damaged its own success, but also abandoned its vital role as a gatekeeper and embraced the idea that the success of the PS is a threat to the PSD. These two changes in partisan behavior and

¹⁶⁰ Figueiredo, "Chega: The Worst of the Portuguese System Now Has a Party."

norms, compounded by Ventura's ability to appeal to the Portuguese electorate in ways that previous far-right parties have failed to, have toppled the arguments laid out by Rodrigo Quintas da Silva that Portugal is politically and culturally immune to populism.

Geographic Analysis: Rust Belts in Portugal

In the United States and Europe, populism has been particularly powerful in regions that have seen a substantial decline in manufacturing employment over the past few decades. The decline of manufacturing and increases in trade, offshoring, and automation have furthered the divide between small, struggling cities and towns and large, thriving cities.¹⁶¹ In Portugal, these existing divides between small cities and towns and the coastal tourist hubs were exacerbated even further by the global financial crisis of 2008 and the Portuguese financial crisis that occurred in the years afterward. After these crises, the Partido Social Democrata began to see lackluster support from Portugal's rural areas. When Ventura ran for president in 2021, the vast majority of his support came from these very rural areas, areas that are experiencing long-term economic and social decline coupled with political dissatisfaction.

Ventura's success in the 2021 presidential election was astounding in comparison to his minimal success in the 2019 parliamentary elections. Similar to the United States, Portugal's left-right political divide largely aligns with the urban-rural divide. Portugal's large cities and metropolitan centers dot the coast, and Rust Belt communities line the inside of the country near Spanish border. During his 2019 campaign for the Assembleia da República, Ventura was limited to campaigning only within the Lisbon district, where most were quick to ignore his loud political presence and outlandish policy objectives. Lisbon, like most other urban centers across

¹⁶¹ Lawrence J. Broz et al. "Populism in Place: The Economic Geography of the Globalization Backlash." *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2019), 1.

the globe, leans far to the political left. While his ability to gain a single seat in the Assembleia da República was noteworthy, his success was relatively minimal in 2019. When Ventura ran for president in 2021, he was no longer confined to campaigning only within the urban Lisbon district, and instead was able to appeal to the expanse of Portugal.

When analyzing the vote breakdown by district, it is evident that the massive outpouring of support for Ventura came from most of Portugal's rural regions, the very areas that have experienced local decline and previous dissatisfaction with the PSD. Figure 1 illustrates these geographic results. From left to right, the three maps color code which candidate won the most, second-most, and third-most presidential votes in each of Portugal's eighteen districts. Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, the incumbent, is represented by orange-coded districts. Rebelo de Sousa won first place in every Portuguese electoral district and is the first presidential candidate in Portuguese history to achieve such widespread geographic support.¹⁶² In a moment where both Portuguese political parties are struggling to present a unified front, Rebelo de Sousa's success is particularly astounding. When looking at the success of Ventura in comparison with second-place winner Ana Gomes, the geographic relevance of Ventura's appeals become clearer. Pink-coded districts were won by Ana Gomes of the Partido Socialista and navy-coded districts represent Ventura. Ventura came in second to Rebelo de Sousa in virtually every rural district, while Gomes came in second in every district that contains a large city, namely Lisbon, Setúbal, Porto, and Braga.

Ventura's electoral success in rural regions paints a picture that is strikingly similar to the notion that "Rust Belt" economies are drivers of populism. The success of Chega in rural Portugal, particularly in districts that strongly supported Rebelo de Sousa in 2016 such as

¹⁶² Diogo Camilo, "Marcelo é o Primeiro Presidente Da República a Vencer Em Todos Os Concelhos Do País." *Sábado*, Sábado (25 Jan. 2021).

Brangança, Vila Real, and Viseu, perhaps indicates that these regions have long been dissatisfied with the traditional right in Portugal, but that there has not been many viable alternatives.¹⁶³ Perhaps this lack of political variety on the right can explain why so many rural Portuguese communities have been dissatisfied with the traditional right since the onset of the financial crisis. Chega has filled that demand and appeals most powerfully to those in rural regions that are disconnected to the PSD. Ventura's anti-establishment populism is most resonant in the areas of Portugal which have been hardest hit by the financial crises, and these very same regions are most dissatisfied with existing political options. Given these connections, it appears as though those who are most dissatisfied with Portuguese democracy are those who have been particularly affected by the country's economic situation.

Conclusion

Prior to the rise of Chega, Portugal was perceived to have multiple cultural attributes and structures that naturally prevented populism from becoming a prominent form of political discourse. Portugal's low immigration rates, general satisfaction with the European Union, and recent authoritarian history were thought to have made populism unattractive to the Portuguese electorate. These factors, combined with the stability of the two largest political parties and their unwillingness to collaborate with far-right political groups, have historically kept populism on the fringes of Portuguese political discourse. Yet, André Ventura has managed to dismantle each of these historical barriers to populism in Portugal. Ventura appeals to those who are anti-immigrant and Eurosceptics, however this is only a small component of his success. His entrance into the political sphere in a time where the traditional right has been struggling allowed

¹⁶³ Tilo Wagner, "Portugal Is Not Immune to Right-Wing Populism After All." *International Politics Society Journal*, International Politics Society Journal, February 11 2021.

him to leverage his small following in the Azores to attempt to unseat the socialists, which granted Ventura political legitimacy that is traditionally not awarded to populist parties. This legitimacy rapidly increased his popularity and allowed him to begin to destabilize the two prominent parties in Portugal. Without the economic crises that have plagued Portugal over the past fifteen years, perhaps dissatisfaction with the traditional political right would not be so pervasive, and Ventura would not be as effective. Support for Ventura comes primarily from rural Portugal, the very same regions that have borne the brunt of the economic crises of the past decade or so. In total, it appears as though Ventura's success hinges upon his tactics, of which appealing to the politically disenfranchised is a key component. Those who feel politically disenfranchised are disproportionately voters who support the PSD, and PSD support has been declining since the onset of the economic crises. Rural Portugal is home to the vast majority of the country's PSD voters, indicating that support for Ventura seems to pour from Portugal's politically dissatisfied, economically struggling communities.

Although Portugal has traditionally been viewed as an exception to the phenomenon of right-wing populism that is occurring in many democracies, the rise of Ventura and Chega have exemplified that perhaps Portugal is not particularly equipped to prevent populism, but rather that no politician or party has strategically appealed to the very people who feel the pang of economic, social, and political disenfranchisement. While Ventura's success may be discouraging to those who have viewed Portugal as an exemplar of resistance to populism, Portugal's future remains notably more optimistic than the outlook for many other states coping with a rise of populism. The success of President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, particularly in an era in which Portuguese confidence in government is remarkably low, insinuates that many Portuguese citizens are still committed to democracy. In addition to his amicability, Rebelo de

Sousa has crossed political barriers in ways few other Portuguese presidents have, particularly in his willingness to work directly with the opposition party to address the COVID-19 crisis. Additionally, the vast majority of Portuguese citizens remain outwardly opposed to Ventura. According to political scientist Mariana Costa Lobo, about one-fifth of Portugal's electorate holds political views that are consistent with right-wing populism across Europe.¹⁶⁴ Since the democratization of Portugal in the 1970s, about thirteen percent of the population has consistently expressed approval of the authoritarian Estado Novo regime. Given that Ventura won about twelve percent of the national vote in the 2021 election, it is worth considering whether his following is simply the same population of Portuguese people that have long been nostalgic for the Salazar regime and eager to support far-right parties. In addition, about two-thirds of the Portuguese electorate have expressed explicit opposition to Ventura.¹⁶⁵ While upcoming elections will indicate whether Ventura's popularity will continue to grow, it seems unlikely that he will be able overcome such broad disapproval ratings in a way that allows him to gain substantial power.

In the words of Cas Mudde, right-wing populism is a matter of supply rather than demand, and states that have failed to see a substantial far-right party emerge have simply “not yet been confronted with the right populist radical right party or political entrepreneur.”¹⁶⁶ Prior to Ventura, it was thought that Portugal was immune to populist discourse. However, it appears instead that no leader had strategically appealed to the particular sentiments of political and economic disenfranchisement that exist among Portuguese citizens. Ventura's appeals to those who perceive the government and welfare state as corrupt, to those who are dissatisfied with the PSD and their economic situation, and the PSD's abandonment of the norms that typically

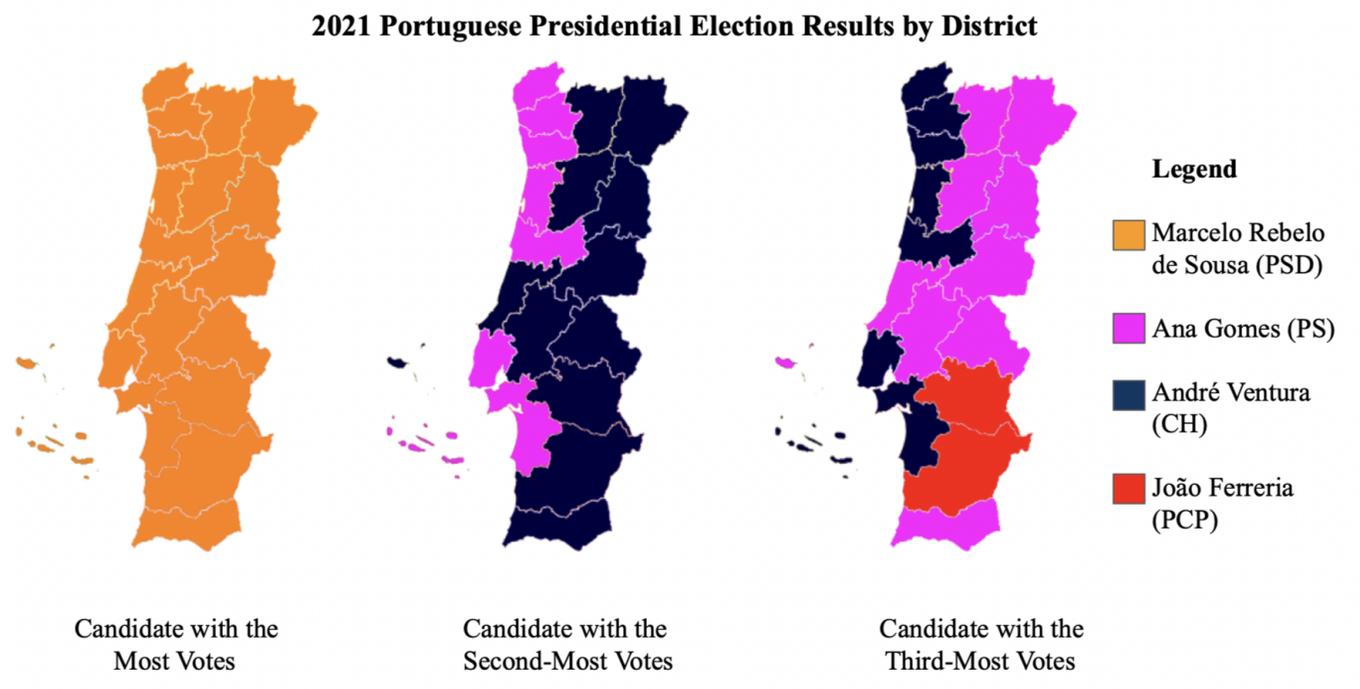
¹⁶⁴ Wagner, “Portugal Is Not Immune to Right-Wing Populism After All.”

¹⁶⁵ Wagner, “Portugal Is Not Immune to Right-Wing Populism After All.”

¹⁶⁶ Mendes, “The Rise of Chega and the End of Portuguese Exceptionalism.”

prevent parties like Chega from becoming legitimized reflect the idea that, even in states that appear to be immune to populism, democracy can be perceived as zero-sum. Ventura strategically tapped into components of Portuguese political culture and structures that exploited this notion that Portuguese democracy is a zero-sum game, which awarded him political success that was previously inaccessible to far-right leaders in Portugal.

Figure 1



Source: *Mapa Oficial N.º 1-A/2021*. COMISSÃO NACIONAL DE ELEIÇÕES, 9 Feb. 2021. dre.pt/application/conteudo/156971146.

Conclusion

This analysis of the United States and Portugal exemplifies how domestic conditions can alter the prevalence of populism and the degree to which it is successful. There are features of populism and tactics used by populist leaders that are common in each case, but these common features result in different outcomes in varying political ecosystems. The United States and Portugal demonstrate that, while norms and political structures effect how populism manifests, the threats of far-right rhetoric on democracy can become present in any state. In both the U.S. and Portugal, populist candidates for president found unprecedented political success by painting democracy as a zero-sum endeavor, and by portraying the success of one's opponents, whether on the individual level or one's partisan opponents, as a loss to oneself.

In both the United States and Portugal, populist rhetoric has become popular because Donald Trump and André Ventura have sown together ideas and grievances in ways that others have not. Ventura and Trump use similar strategies, however what is most notable about their success is that each of them has strategically appealed to existing political and cultural grievances in their respective state in a way that makes their appeals resonate deeply. In the U.S., Donald Trump has relied heavily on appealing to voters' conceptions of American identity, particularly those that are rooted in racial nationalism. He has painted a picture of the United States that shows political elites unfairly favoring minority groups and connects this to rising inequality by convincing Americans that their economic concerns are caused by this unfair collaboration between the government and minority groups. The recent history of the Tea Party movement in the United States indicates that populism is not a phenomenon new to the American political sphere, but rather that the sentiments Trump has tied together have been brewing in the United States for over a decade. While it is a norm that political parties in the

United States act as gatekeepers, partisan polarization contributed to Trump's success because the Republican party claimed Trump and used him as a means to defeat their political opposition. In general, both individuals and political parties see "the other" as an intrinsic threat in the United States.

In Portugal, André Ventura and Chega have become much more successful than past far-right parties and leaders because he managed to appeal to the Portuguese people in a way that sidestepped many past reservations or fears about populist parties. Instead of using issues such as immigration and Euroscepticism to fuel his campaign, issues that have historically lacked appeal to the Portuguese electorate, Ventura places his emphasis on government corruption, which is a particular concern for many Portuguese people. Much like Trump, Ventura speaks to a "forgotten" class of Portuguese voters, those who he believes are cheated by the government because they work hard only to give large sums of their income to the robust Portuguese welfare state. The welfare state, he argues, supports lazy and undeserving citizens, but not the "true" Portuguese people. Ventura's success, however, is limited by the party structure of Portugal. In theory, the multi-party system makes it difficult for small parties to have much influence without building coalitions. The PSD's decision to allow Chega to enter in a coalition in order to take power from the socialists violated Portuguese political norms, because cooperating with anti-system parties has been largely frowned upon since the fall of Portugal's dictatorship. While this provided Chega with a new sense of legitimacy among Portuguese people, a vast majority of Portuguese citizens still oppose Ventura. Although his voter base is growing, the rejection of far-right politics and populism in Portugal that stems from the collective memory of authoritarianism will be a difficult barrier to overcome if Ventura will continue to grow his following.

Ventura and Trump's appeals are most resonant in Rust Belt regions, cities and towns that have seen economic decline and a subsequent decline in living standards. In the United States, these regions were the driving force behind Trump's electoral success, and the very regions in which his success greatly exceeded that of Republican candidates from elections prior. In Portugal, Ventura's support was also carried by these regions, but not to the same degree. Ventura came in second to incumbent Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa in every district. In addition, Ventura did not gain votes from across the political spectrum, but rather the majority of his support came from voters who typically vote for the right. It is noteworthy that, while each state is dealing with high degrees of economic inequality, Rust Belt support for populism is more effective and more robust in the United States, where inequality exists in a much greater degree.

In total, this project exemplifies that no state is immune to populism. While certain political structures, cultures, or geographic trends can exacerbate or dull the rise of populist rhetoric, the cases of Portugal and the United States demonstrate that populist rhetoric is most effective when it is tailored to appeal to the domestic climate and culture within which it arises. Portugal, once considered an exception to far-right politics, exemplifies that populism can arise even in political systems and cultures that have historically seemed to be insulated against this type of political discourse. What changed, however, is Ventura's strategic approach. Even though Trump and Ventura have strategically appealed to their respective electorates in slightly different ways, their success shares two common qualities. First, both Trump and Ventura have emphasized and perpetuated the idea that their democracies operate in a zero-sum manner, and that both the system and those who are undeserving are working against the "true" people. Secondly, the success of Trump and Ventura were both catalyzed by electoral support in Rust Belt regions, indicating that economic disenfranchisement is, to an indeterminate degree, a driver

of support for populism in both the U.S. and Portugal. Thus, regardless of the structural, cultural, and historical differences between the U.S. and Portugal, that the idea that democratic governance is zero-sum is particularly relevant in places which have been particularly affected by regional economic decline. It is noteworthy, however, that these trends remain the same even though the general outlook for economic inequality is adverse in the U.S. and Portugal. In the U.S., the decline of these regions has been exacerbated by a drastic increase in economic inequality in the country as a whole. In Portugal, Rust Belt regions have undergone changes and difficulties as manufacturing has declined and global economic models have shifted, but Portugal as a whole has consistently reduced the wealth gap in the past few decades. Perhaps this indicates that further exploration is required in regard to the role of perception of one's economic status in affecting their susceptibility to populism.

In addition to studying the role of perceptions of one's economic status, there are a few other themes and topics briefly raised in this analysis that, if I were to continue working on this project, warrant more discussion and analysis. First, I briefly noted that the United States and Portugal are notably different in that the United States is and historically has been a very individualistic state, while Portugal is the one of the most collectivistic democracies in Europe. When analyzing how people conceive of democracy, particularly in regard to whether democracy is zero-sum, it is noteworthy to examine how cultural conceptions of one's normative obligations to others affects their responsiveness to populism. Second, although this analysis has noted that, regardless of general trends of economic inequality, populism thrives in Rust Belt regions, this analysis could be pursued in greater depth. To what degree did the success of populist candidates in these regions influence political outcomes? Third, I focused particularly on how Trump and Ventura campaigned for president and their electoral outcomes. However due to lack of space

and time, I was unable to analyze how these two leaders have actually influenced policy and political norms once in office, whether it be in the presidency or in the legislature. To better assess the how political structures encourage or discourse populist success, it would be worth pursuing how these two actors have behaved and been able to influence the political sphere once in office. Lastly, this analysis of Trump and Ventura faced significant constraints solely because the effects of both Trump and Ventura are still new and still evolving. Although Trump has left office in the U.S., his role within the Republican party and within U.S. politics is still being determined. In Portugal, Ventura is a relatively new political actor, and many are anticipating local elections in fall of 2021 and parliamentary elections in 2022 in order to assess the true reach of Chega in Portugal. The ongoing political careers of both of these figures will continue to provide insight as to how the success of populism is dependent on domestic conditions.

In the words of Yascha Mounk, the rise of right-wing populism in liberal democracies will not be a fleeting moment in our history, but rather we are only at the beginning of a “dawning age of populism.”¹⁶⁷ The similarities and contrasts between the United States and Portugal exemplify that, while certain domestic factors can exacerbate or lessen the degree to which populist rhetoric is successful, the rise of zero-sum assumptions about democracy can be exploited by populists even in states that have been considered an exception to right-wing populism. The notion that contemporary liberal democracies, although their domestic conditions may vary, are susceptible to populist appeals across the board is resonant of Mounk’s suggestion that the past stability of democracy was brought about by conditions that are no longer in place. As the framing of democratic governance as a zero-sum endeavor is utilized by populists across

¹⁶⁷ Yascha Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It*, 265.

the globe, perhaps this suggests that our perception of democracy as a collective pursuit for the common good is a condition that no longer exists.

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