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Neoliberalism: A Populist Crisis of Conscience for America

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at  
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors  
Spring 2019

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## Abstract

*The following paper examines the relationship between Populism and Neoliberalism in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century in the U.S. Through the lens of a historical-structural analysis, it tests the hypothesis set forth by authors David Harvey, Dawson Barrett, and John B. Judis that the prominence of Populism in the 2016 election cycle could not be explained without the phenomenon of Neoliberalism in the U.S. To accomplish this, it examines the rise of income inequality and Neoliberal globalization and uses statistical and polling data to determine whether these variables were related to Neoliberalism and whether voters reacted to them in 2016. It further examines the issues espoused by Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders and looks at polling data to determine the beliefs of their supporters. By categorizing Bernie Sanders as an anti-Capitalist and Donald Trump as an anti-Globalist Populist, it sets up an empirical test to determine whether their supporters were primed for these Populist arguments. In finding that their supporters were indeed especially primed for these arguments and further finding that these rhetorical styles were linked to Neoliberalism via their opposition to the issues of income inequality and Neoliberal globalization – policy positions which are coded in this paper as anti-Neoliberal - this paper comes to the conclusion that the hypothesis that Neoliberalism provided a unique rhetorical catalyst for Populists to exploit is supported.*

## Executive Summary

My thesis project, entitled “Neoliberalism: A Populist Crisis of Conscience for America”, is a Political Science research paper that is focused on understanding why Populists like Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders experienced such widespread support and success in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. It focuses on testing the hypothesis, as outlined by scholars David Harvey, Dawson Barrett, and John B. Judis, who have written on this topic before me, that it is the policies and consequences of the doctrine of Neoliberalism that created one fertile rhetorical ground for those Populists to exploit. Briefly, a Populist is a political actor who employs the narrative framework of Populism to win popular support in an election. Populism is a malleable narrative that focuses on a telling of the story of politics that pits “the people” (as defined by the Populist) against “the elite”, who the Populist casts as having created a crisis (or profited off of or done nothing in response to a crisis) that in some way hurts or oppresses “the people”. Neoliberalism is

a political and economic doctrine of thought, colloquially known as “Reaganomics” or “trickle-down economics” that prizes individual freedoms above all else. It takes the view that the market is the ultimate tool for humankind and works to ensure market freedoms through the deregulation of industries and the movement of capital and the privatization of as much of the economy as is feasible.

Throughout the paper, I employ a few steps to ascertain a rigorous empirical test for the hypothesis set forth. First, I break down the hypothesis into the assumption that, if Neoliberalism can be correlated to the rise and success of Populism, then the best way to observe that would be to look at trends in public opinion data to determine whether “anti-Neoliberal sentiment” has been trending upward over the years that the doctrine has been in place. I further assume that any polling done specifically on ‘Neoliberalism’ would be faulty data, as it is a technical Political Science term that few outside the world of Political Science would be able to grasp completely. Instead of looking for public opinion data on that specific topic, then, I decided to break down “anti-Neoliberal sentiment” into trends in opinion regarding two key issues related to Neoliberalism: the rise in income inequality and issues related to globalization such as immigration, trade and outsourcing, and the U.S.’s role on the global stage. By coding anti-Neoliberal sentiment in this way, I could look at more reliable public opinion data and, taking the view that the ideology equals the sum of its parts and consequences in the public eye, provide a more definitive answer as to the question of how/ whether voters have responded to the issues posed by the rise of Neoliberalism. When I broke down anti-Neoliberal sentiment into these variables, I was able to find growing concern regarding the issue of income inequality and growing isolationist and nationalist views amongst the electorate. This supported the hypothesis that anti-Neoliberal sentiment has been growing over the years that the doctrine has been in place.

To connect this rise in anti-Neoliberal sentiment to the rise of Populism, though, requires an additional step. The way that I chose to examine the connection was by looking at the rhetoric of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump and looking at the beliefs of their supporters to determine whether they had especially potent reactions to the variables examined. To do this, I defined Bernie Sanders as an anti-Capitalist Populist who was focused on Economic Populism and railed against Capitalism in his rhetoric. I defined Donald Trump as an anti-Globalist Populist, who employed nationalistic and nativist rhetoric to appeal to fears about immigration and diversity. With those definitions in place, I was able to look for those similar beliefs among the bases of support for each candidate. I found that their supporters did indeed react strongly to the issues of income inequality and globalism respectively, but I wanted to be especially sure that the opinion data was valid. Studies have shown that voters, especially when they are uneducated on specific issues, tend to assume the views of the party elite that they follow. That means that public opinion data might not necessarily be representative of those voters' views as much as it was representative of the views of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump. To be sure that it was representative of the views of voters, then, I set up one more test. I looked at the demographic breakdowns of the bases of support for each candidate and looked for standout traits. Among both bases of support, age was the defining factor: for Sanders, it was the votes of the youth, and for Trump, it was the votes of older voters. I then found studies showing that younger voters have increasingly negative views of Capitalism and increasingly positive views of Socialism, suggesting that Bernie Sanders' base of support was, in fact, looking for a candidate espousing anti-Capitalist rhetoric and not just adopting the views of a party leader. Similarly, I found studies linking aging to feelings of nationalism and isolationism, suggesting that Donald Trump's base was primed for anti-Globalist rhetoric. These findings, combined with the polling data I examined, showed clearly that the supporters of each

candidate were reacting strongly to the variables of income inequality and globalism, reactions that I had coded as anti-Neoliberal in nature. These findings meant that the hypothesis was supported, and it appears as though Neoliberalism was a key factor in the success of Populists in 2016.

The significance of this project lies mostly in the argument that Populism, in modern democracies, is a useful tool for identifying problems that the citizens of a democracy might have. Populism, as laid out in the definition, is an indication of a crisis or *perceived* crisis in society that citizens want tended to. When Populists enjoy success, it is because the political elite is unresponsive to those concerns. When Populists come along, then, it is important to understand why in order to root out the crisis that led to the rise of the Populist. By testing the relationship between the rise of Neoliberalism and Populism, I was working to see whether Neoliberalism was a crisis (or perceived crisis) that people were reacting to. The success of the hypothesis means that we must at least have an honest conversation about why it may have led to such a strong reaction. Understanding Populism can help us understand the undercurrents of political support and can provide us with the tools to determine how to fix our trajectory. The work of this project suggests that a conversation needs to be had about the place of Neoliberalism within our society. It does not help to ignore the catalysts for Populists, instead choosing to focus simply on counteracting and removing the Populist. Counteracting Populism means targeting its catalysts. This project should help us do that.

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## Introduction

What explains the rise and prevalence of Populism in the U.S. in 2016? In this project, I examine the hypothesis set forth by scholars David Harvey, Dawson Barrett, and John B. Judis that Populism in 2016 was, in part, the culmination of a reaction against the policies and consequences of Neoliberalism. Specifically, this project provides a plausibility test for the question of whether the Neoliberal agenda, and the policies associated with it, helped paved the way for Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders to campaign with credible Populist messages.

While the focus of this project is on Neoliberalism, I recognize that there are many contextual factors that need to be explained in order to present an intellectually honest conclusion. As such, I have decided to include a discussion of the ethno-cultural elements that have helped to shape our modern world, especially as they pertain to race and religion. This section, “The Context for a Neoliberal World”, follows the section “Defining Populism”. I feel that this discussion will provide context and nuance that will make the conclusion I arrive at after testing the hypothesis set forth by Harvey, Barrett, and Judis more compelling.

In my thesis, I explore the relationship between Neoliberalism and Populism through the lens of a historical analysis. Briefly, by referring to “Populism”, I mean what Michael Kazin refers to as “a flexible mode of persuasion”. It is a way of telling the story of politics that focuses on pitting “the people” against “the elite”. Populism is a highly amorphous concept, but in this project, I focus on two strains: Bernie Sanders’ anti-Capitalist Economic Populism and Donald Trump’s anti-Globalist Political Populism. I examine Neoliberalism as the catalyst for Populist expressions in America through its direct and indirect impact on American politics. I work to test this relationship by connecting Neoliberalism to the two major variables I am examining (income inequality and the impact of Neoliberal globalization on immigration and related variables) and

relating the rise and messages of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump to these variables. I do this by examining how (and if) the candidacies of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump tailored their campaigns to these variables. I use public opinion data to examine general trends over the years and specific attitudes among the supporters of such movements to ascertain an empirical connection between upwardly trending feelings of anti-Neoliberal sentiment (as defined by opposition to the two main variables examined) and the rise of Populism as a response.

This project primarily builds on the works of Dawson Barrett's *The Defiant: Protest Movements in Post-Liberal America*, which documents various protests that have arisen over the years in response to Neoliberalism and examines their messages; John B. Judis' *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European politics*, which highlights global trends in the rise in Populism and relates them to Neoliberal policies; and David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, which documents the what, how, and why of Neoliberalism and juxtaposes the goals and values of Neoliberal reformers to actual global trends. I also utilize Eric J. Oliver and Wendy M. Rahn's scholarly article *Rise of the Trumpenvolk* for an analysis of Populism among the candidates and 2016 and data collected from other sources to comment on and augment their arguments. I use a myriad of other books and sources for various reasons, but it is primarily the conversation that these books and this article have generated that this paper seeks to comment on.

The purpose of this project is multifaceted. In the first sense, it exists to explain the success of Populists in 2016. Additionally, my work focuses in on the Populist reaction in 2016, but takes the view that Populism is symptomatic and indicative of a larger problem. In my definition of Populism, I include reference to the idea that a Populist message inherently latches on to a crisis or *perceived* crisis for credibility. The presence of Populism, then, can be a good indicator of policy

failure. The sweeping success of Populists, as seen in the election of Donald Trump, suggests that that crisis and policy failure must have been rather serious. This paper attempts to test the connection between Neoliberalism and Populism to see if it can be understood as a systemic cause of the crisis/ crises that Populists exploited. Any reader should understand it in this context; this paper seeks to root out a malady, taking the view that Populism indicates such a presence, and comment on what may be done about it.

Before beginning my analysis, I need to address other elements in the rise of Populism that have garnered much attention. I believe, for example, that the advent of “fake news” helped to play a role in the rise and success of Populism. The story of Brexit and the rise of Donald Trump would be incomplete without information on Cambridge Analytica and the related Russian interference. These elements complicate the picture. That said, numerous scholars, including the well-regarded statistician Nate Silver of *FiveThirtyEight.com*, have indicated the trickiness of discerning just how much Russian interference mattered<sup>1</sup>. I believe that these issues need to be considered as factors in the rise of Populism, but not as the primary systemic impetus driving it. Additionally, understand that I treat Neoliberalism as a piece of a larger puzzle. A thesis of this size could not possibly comprehensively consider all the interrelated elements in the rise of Populism. As such, I make brief note here to acknowledge other factors, but do not consider them in greater detail, instead choosing to focus on examining the variable of Neoliberalism.

In my paper, I find through a historical-structural analysis that there is a relationship between Neoliberalism and the two key variables that I am examining for their relation to anti-Neoliberal sentiment (income inequality and Neoliberal globalization). Individually, I find that

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<sup>1</sup> And several studies, as indicated in the *New York Times* article “Fake News and Bots May Be Worrisome, but Their Political Power Is Overblown”, have shown that fake news really isn’t that significant a factor in swinging elections.

there is no noticeable difference between sentiment toward income inequality at the start of measurement and the modern day. When examining more specific polls, however, like those focusing on attitudes toward raising the minimum wage and attitudes toward the amount of profit that large corporations make, there does appear to be a growing dissatisfaction with the state of income inequality in the U.S. On the issue of globalization and immigration, an upward trend in feelings that offshoring is a major problem and an upward trend in isolationist sentiment suggest a negative reaction to this consequence of Neoliberalism. Upward trends in nativism, especially among right-wing voters, also suggest that this issue was a key one for Populists to exploit.

These trends provide the basis for understanding Populism in 2016 as a reaction to rising anti-Neoliberal sentiment. Examining the views of the supporters of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump provides the final empirical test for whether voters actually reacted to these issues. By examining demographic data, and finding that the key defining factor of Sanders' and Trump's bases was age – youth support and the support of 65+ voters for Sanders and Trump respectively – and linking that demographic factor to the traits of an electorate especially primed for anti-Capitalist and anti-Globalist Populism, I come to the conclusion that Sanders and Trump both did indeed exploit bases especially primed for anti-Neoliberal messaging and effectively find that the contention that Neoliberalism created did provide a 'crisis' for Populists to exploit.

## **Methods**

In designing this paper, the argumentation that I have put forth relies primarily on a robust historical-structural analysis supplemented by demographic and polling data. This process has meant the compilation of works across the spectrum of political science, political philosophy, and political theory in order to best provide a working theory that might to explain the world around

us in the most robust way possible. I have relied on the exhaustive work of scholars like David Harvey, Michael Kazin, John B. Judis, and Dawson Barrett to call upon implicit historical arguments rather than compiling a historical tome myself. I take their work and supplement it with polling data while also using other books and scholarly papers to cross-reference and check their theories. Where appropriate, I point out the flaws in their texts and utilize other sources to fill those gaps. I treat their works as primarily a basis for the historical argument in this paper, but I do refer to the theories and analysis that they posit where appropriate. I do this so that I can help to ensure that I am mostly relying on their work for the empirical and objective effort that they put forward (such as Harvey's examination of global GDP before and after Neoliberalism), leaving most of the analysis and synthesis to my own work. I also do this to link the two ideas into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Finally, I try to link claims about popular protest movements and shifting national opinion to polling data from sources like Gallup, Pew Research Center, American National Election Studies, Public Religion Research Institute, and others. I do this to make the established hypothesis falsifiable.

In this paper, I have designed the first empirical test in a way that may be confusing to some. Logically, to connect Neoliberalism to Populism, it might make sense to try to trend feelings of resentment toward Neoliberalism, considered here to be anti-Neoliberal sentiment. In reality, it is implausible to think that such polling data asking voters to explicitly outline their feelings toward Neoliberalism would be useful. Neoliberalism is a complex and barely understood term, and polling voters for their feelings about complex Political Science jargon would be fruitless. Instead, I take the view that the best way to see if there is a connection between Populism and Neoliberalism would be to take the view that Neoliberalism can be equated to the sum of its parts: if it can be shown, through a historical-structural analysis, that Neoliberalism is responsible for major 'crises'

in our society that Populists have undertaken as issues for their platform, then examining voter opinion regarding those crises should logically show an empirical relationship between Neoliberalism and the rise of Populism. As such, I have outlined two separate variables and consider them to be the ‘crises’ worthy of a Populist message. Those issues are as follows: income inequality and Neoliberal globalization and trade and issues related to immigration (which, as the historical analysis illustrates, are all interconnected issues).

## **Defining Neoliberalism**

### *The Promise*

According to noted Political Philosopher David Harvey’s work *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*,

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (Harvey 2)

As Harvey notes, Neoliberalism’s guiding philosophy lies in the belief that markets should represent the primary governing force for all aspects of modern society. As such, Neoliberalism is concerned with practices of deregulation and privatization in the name of “freeing” markets from government intervention. If a market doesn’t exist in a particular area, Neoliberals will argue that one should and must be created.

Under Neoliberal tenets, the state is severely limited and reduced mostly to the role of maintaining the value of currency. Beyond this capacity, the state is also responsible for

establishing a military for the purposes of procuring and maintaining markets<sup>2</sup>. The state largely acts as a policing force, deregulating and privatizing industries to get out of the way of the mechanisms of the market. There is an inherent tension between the principles of Neoliberalism and the intermingling of the state and economic/ corporatist actors that will be addressed, but for now, I am laying out the theoretical model and the ideology of Neoliberalism in order to establish a coherent framework that I can comment on and refer to.

Historically, Neoliberalism's main proponents have been philosophers and economists like Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek. There have also been many prominent political actors who have espoused Neoliberal values. The early adopters - and perhaps best-known political proponents - were President Ronald Reagan in the United States and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom. In the U.S., the practice came to be colloquially known as "Reaganomics" or "Trickle-Down Economics". In Europe<sup>3</sup> and the U.K., the practice has mostly been known as "The Third Way".

There are several main components that David Harvey considers in laying out the theoretical framework for Neoliberal states. Neoliberal states tend to favor strong individual property rights, the rule of law, and institutions of freely functioning markets and free trade, as "these are the institutional arrangements considered essential to guarantee individual freedoms" (Harvey 64). Neoliberal proponents also believe in a legal framework governed by "freely negotiated contractual obligations between juridical individuals in the marketplace" (Harvey 64).

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<sup>2</sup> This will be addressed in greater detail later, but for now, the U.S.'s military conquests (specifically the wars in Vietnam and Iraq) over the last several decades provide a good example of a state employing a military with economic goals in mind.

<sup>3</sup> Other experiments with Neoliberalism occurred in countries like Germany and, as will be discussed momentarily, the European Union (along with the United Nations and other international governing bodies) arose on the heels of Neoliberal thought.

The freedom of businesses and corporations to operate within the national framework is understood as a fundamental good, as “private enterprise and entrepreneurial initiative are seen as the keys to innovation and wealth creation” (Harvey 64). Neoliberals focus on continuous increases in productivity which are expected to deliver higher living standards for everyone (this is commonly understood in the phrase “a rising tide will lift all boats” which presumes that the elimination of poverty can best be achieved through free markets and free trade). Above all, Neoliberalism prizes “individual liberty”, a value that is presumed to be achievable only through truly free market interactions.

From a policy perspective, these values mean a major focus on the privatization and deregulation of industries. The primary claim here is that the combination of privatization, deregulation, and competition serves to “eliminate bureaucratic red tape”, increasing efficiency and productivity, improving the quality of goods and services, and reducing costs to consumers (Harvey 65). As such, the Neoliberal state is in perpetual motion, constantly reorganizing itself and seeking new institutional arrangements that improve its competitiveness on the global market.

Freedom of competition is not the only guiding policy principle, however. More than anything, a focus on individual freedoms is central to Neoliberal thought. Harvey outlines how this extends to Neoliberal policy creation by explaining that freedoms are preserved in the market, but individuals are held accountable for their own actions outside of the protections granted to those participating in the market (Harvey 65-66). He argues that “This principle extends into the realms of welfare, education, health care, and even pensions... Individual success or failure are interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings... rather than being attributed to any systemic property (Harvey 65-66).

In a Neoliberal system, the market is the final arbiter. It guarantees individual freedoms and individual rights and is believed to do so in the most democratic and fair way possible. It is this line of thinking that guides Neoliberal policymaking, and it is the reliance on the market that explains the preference to defer to markets in all decision-making matters.

Finally, in a Neoliberal system, “The free mobility of capital between sectors, regions, and countries is regarded as critical” (Harvey 65). Neoliberals prize global and international competition, taking the somewhat radical view that state sovereignty should be subordinate to the global market<sup>4</sup>. As such, Neoliberals believe that any barriers to free trade and competition should be eliminated and markets can and should be established wherever possible. As a result of these beliefs, Neoliberals tend to favor Technocracy (government controlled by technical experts) or Plutocracy (government controlled by the wealthy) to Democracy, taking the view that the people cannot be entrusted with the preservation of markets.

### ***The Reality: Neoliberalization in Practice***

Most who are familiar with Political Science and Political Theory will recognize the reality that any ideology is different in theory and practice. Neoliberalism is no exception to that rule.

A Neoliberal state needs to create a good business and investment culture for capitalistic endeavors in order to thrive. The implementation of that culture carries with it a number of biases, however. Most Neoliberals tend to favor the freedoms of corporations while treating labor and the environment as commodities. Neoliberals tend to favor the integrity of the financial system and the solvency of financial institutions over the well-being of the population or environmental quality

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<sup>4</sup> A philosophy that many Populists, especially throughout Europe, have been highly critical of. For example, the “Brexit” movement in the U.K. and Marine Le Pen’s rise in France highlight the tension that this belief creates.

in cases of conflict (Harvey 70-71). Neoliberals are always opportunistically seeking markets and advantages, usually at the expense of ideological consistency. Nowhere is this concept more pronounced than in the authoritarian reach of the military arm of Neoliberal economies.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq illustrates this point. When the U.S. occupied Iraq, one of the first moves was to establish free markets in all areas of the economy and eliminate trade barriers (Harvey 6). In the process, they established a Neoliberal state. Harvey argues that “according to neoliberal theory, the sorts of measures that [U.S. Diplomat Paul Bremer] outlined were both necessary and sufficient for the creation of wealth and therefore for the improved well-being of the population at large. The assumption that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade is a cardinal feature of neoliberal thinking” (Harvey 7). In reality, the creation of a Neoliberal state established freedoms for corporations but tread on the autonomy of the citizens of Iraq.

The reach of the U.S.’s military arm highlights a key aspect of Neoliberalization: Capitalist globalization<sup>5</sup>. Here, I define the process of Neoliberalization broadly. This concept contains the notion of the expansion of the Neoliberal state at home through domestic policies and also the expansion of the state abroad in the form of openness to trade and investment and the reaction to flows of people<sup>6</sup>. Since Neoliberalism is about the belief that markets will maximize welfare and allocate resources efficiently, free trade is an integral part of the Neoliberalization process. Thus, Neoliberalization necessarily has a global dimension. Through Neoliberalization, an integrated global economy is formed through the interrelated elements of immigration, trade, and investment.

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<sup>5</sup> For further, more detailed reading, please consult Mark Rupert’s *Ideologies of Globalization: Contending Visions of a New World Order* and Manfred B. Steger’s *Globalism: The New Market Ideology*

<sup>6</sup> By the “reaction to flows of people”, I mean the degree to which a society accepts the influx of a certain people. As the U.S. tightened security at the Southern border in the 1990s, it also welcomed tech entrepreneurs and “high-skill” workers from around the world to help build its burgeoning tech empire.

Because of these disparate elements, backlash against globalization (and hence, backlash against Neoliberalism) can foment as either anti-immigrant or anti-trade sentiment. In relation to the war in Iraq, the U.S.'s military arm represents the global reach and influence of the U.S.'s Neoliberal state. Any actions undertaken in the war are intrinsically tied to the expansion of the U.S.'s Neoliberal influence exactly because of the U.S.'s intention to create free markets to trade with and invest in. In this way, Harvey, Barrett, and Judis see backlash against such actions as indirectly providing a criticism of Neoliberalism. Anti-globalization and anti-Neoliberal criticism are inherently somewhat isolationist, then, because the doctrine of Neoliberalism places an onus on market expansion through any means necessary (Harvey 7). In the case of Iraq, those means were the force of a violent occupation. David Harvey takes a particularly critical view of this practice of Neoliberalization:

We can, therefore, interpret neoliberalization either as a *utopian* project to realize a theoretical design for the reorganization of international capitalism or as a *political* project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites... Neoliberalization has not been very effective in revitalizing global capital accumulation, but it has succeeded remarkably well in restoring, or in some instances (as in Russia and China) creating, the power of an economic elite. The theoretical utopianism of neoliberal argument has, I conclude, primarily worked as a system of justification and legitimation for whatever needed to be done to achieve this goal. (Harvey 19)

Harvey thinks of Neoliberalism as a scam on the American people and believes that it has further implications for Neoliberal citizens. In his view, the competition that Neoliberalism promotes, pitting individuals against one another, naturally lends itself to a certain kind of Nationalistic sentiment. That competition, combined with the necessity that that competition

creates for certain authoritarian practices<sup>7</sup>, like the invasion of Iraq, is primarily justified in these kinds of Nationalistic terms: ‘I’m going to get mine’ (Harvey 85). This means that the globalization element of Neoliberalization may be ripe for popular revolt in several ways: 1) anti-immigrant backlash can foment due to increased openness of borders and increased influx of people, 2) anti-trade backlash can foment due to increased reliance on the interdependence of the system, and 3) Nationalistic fervor, encouraged and emboldened by Neoliberalization’s global competition, can run rampant through a nation. This is a primary claim examined throughout this paper, and this section provides the background for examining Neoliberalism’s connection to Globalism.

In reference to the 2016 paper *Who Supports Populism and What Attracts People to It?* by Bram Spruyt et al., researchers Eric Oliver and Wendy Rahn note that “[Spruyt et al.] argue that globalization makes certain groups, particularly the less well-educated, insecure both about their labor market prospects and their status in society. Identifying with the ‘people’ becomes a way to cope with the uncertainty and vulnerability of their precarious social position” (Oliver and Rahn 192). While Spruyt et al.’s work is in specific reference to contemporary European politics, this reality has obvious implications for Populists around the globe who could easily exploit such anxieties about globalization to signal to this subset of the citizenry that they will be protected and heard by the Populist.

Global Neoliberalization is just one element of the Neoliberal agenda, however. Another key aspect of Neoliberalism in practice is the repression of labor rights, a concept that highlights the ideological inconsistency that Neoliberalism carries with its deference to “freedom”. Neoliberalism is highly opposed to the collective organization of labor and frequently makes decisions at the expense of the laborer. The result tends to be lower wages, increased job insecurity,

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<sup>7</sup> The authoritarian element of Neoliberalism is an important one to examine. For further reading and detail, please consult Ian Bruff’s “The Rise of Authoritarian Neoliberalism” in the journal *Rethinking Marxism*, Volume 26, Issue 1.

and loss of benefits and job protections (Harvey 76). Harvey cites the assaults on labor rights and organization in countries like Mexico, Bangladesh, Indonesia, India, and China to make the point that it seems “that labour control and maintenance of a high rate of labour exploitation have been central to neoliberalization all along” (Harvey 76). In this kind of economy, the social safety net is stripped, and any personal failure is attributed solely to personal failings, weighing doubly on the worker. The repression of labor rights and the erosion of public benefits are especially pertinent to my discussion of income inequality and to my discussion of Populist campaigners like Bernie Sanders, whose campaign had a heavy focus on the rights of the public to access healthcare and education.

At the same time as Neoliberalism represses labor rights, “Businesses and corporations not only collaborate intimately with state actors but even acquire a strong role in writing legislation, determining public policies, and setting regulatory frameworks (which are mainly advantageous to themselves)” (Harvey 76-77). The role of organizations like the CATO institute and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) in the writing of corporate-friendly legislation highlights the bias of the Neoliberal system toward the already wealthy and powerful. Harvey offers a scathing rebuke of this reality: “The coercive arm of the state is augmented to protect corporate interests and, if necessary, to repress dissent... the neoliberal fear that special-interest groups would subvert the state is nowhere better realized than in Washington, where armies of corporate lobbyists... effectively dictate legislation to match their special interests” (Harvey 77). It is this kind of corporate control that people react strongly to, as evidenced by the strong support for the campaigns of politicians like Bernie Sanders, who would make the lack of corporate money in his campaign a key issue in his 2016 run for president. Effectively, while Neoliberal ideology stresses the importance of individual freedoms, it tramples the rights of workers and citizens to

favor the elite. This reality is ripe for popular reaction, and the pressures of groups like Occupy Wall Street bear out that prophecy.

In 1996, World Economic Forum officials Klaus Schwab and Claude Smadja laid out the logic for the argument that Neoliberalism leads to these types of Populist backlash clearly:

Economic globalization has entered a new phase. A mounting backlash against its effects, especially in the industrial democracies, is threatening a disruptive impact on economic activity and social stability in many countries. The mood in these democracies is one of helplessness and anxiety, which helps explain the rise of a new brand of populist politicians. This can easily turn into revolt<sup>8</sup>. (Harvey 81)

It is upon this argumentative basis that I structure my thesis. This thesis explores Populism in 2016 and tries to see if it is an indicator of wavering faith in the current status quo. Neoliberalism has been a dominant ideology for about four decades now, but, writing in 2005, Harvey argued that there are developing cracks in the firmament. Harvey explains that “all is not well with the neoliberal state, and it is for this reason that it appears to be either a transitional or an unstable political form. At the heart of the problem lies a burgeoning disparity between the declared public aims of neoliberalism - the well-being of all - and its actual consequences - the restoration of class power” (Harvey 78-79). Harvey’s scathing criticism of Neoliberalism – that it was never, in fact, an honest ideological argument in favor of individual freedoms, but was rather a more insidious and intentional power grab with the intention of the restoration of class power – highlights the severity of the tension that he sees between the promise and reality of Neoliberalism and highlights how it might have laid the ground for popular revolt.

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that these men come from the World Economic Forum, an ostensibly Neoliberal project dedicated to Neoliberal goals. This quote highlights the realization from within that a threat to that order may be manifest in the modern world.

Throughout this paper, I rely mostly on Harvey's definition of Neoliberalism to explain the phenomenon. When I am referring to the doctrine of Neoliberalism, I am primarily referring to the synthesis of the two ideas of Free Market Capitalism and Globalism. This is useful for understanding both Sanders' and Trump's specific brands of Populism. With this understanding of Neoliberalism in place, I move on to defining Populism and explaining how Sanders and Trump fit into the equation.

## **Defining Populism**

### *The Story of Politics*

There is a wealth of literature on the subject of Populism. Hundreds of authors have undertaken the task of defining and explaining it, yet there is no clear consensus on what it is and what it means for society. Some authors, like Ernesto Laclau, as Mudde and Kaltwasser note, consider Populism to be both the essence of politics and an "emancipatory force" within it (Mudde and Kaltwasser 3). Others, like Jan-Werner Müller, think that Populism poses a serious threat to liberal institutions (Müller 105-114). There is even significant quibbling over just what Populism's definition is.

Why is this concept so contentious? A reason behind the lack of consensus stems from the fact that Populism does not reflect a singular coherent ideology. As Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser put it in their text *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, "populism almost always appears attached to other ideological elements, which are crucial for the promotion of

political projects that are appealing to a broader public. Consequently, by itself populism can offer neither complex nor comprehensive answers to the political questions that modern societies generate” (Mudde and Kaltwasser 6). Their work is specifically targeted towards refuting the two claims that Populism is simply a “political Kampfbegriff (battle term) to denounce political opponents” and that it is “too vague and therefore applies to every political figure” (Mudde and Kaltwasser 1). I think that these are important distinctions to be laid out. Populism has many variants, but that does not mean that a core definition isn’t achievable. With the help of Michael Kazin’s *The Populist Persuasion*, supplemented by more of Mudde and Kaltwasser’s work, I lay out here the definition that I use through the paper.

### *American Populism and the Durable Frame*

Kazin takes a different approach to defining Populism than other authors. From the outset, he works at establishing a framework within which Populist arguments reside and focuses his attention on understanding how that framework is used as a vehicle for the rise of Populists. Kazin views Populism as a kind of political language, a “flexible mode of persuasion” (Kazin 1). To him, Populism is a vehicle through which politicians and movements attempt to convince the people that the politician is on their side. It is a narrative and rhetorical device designed to play to the

values of fellow Americans<sup>9</sup>. To define Populism, then, takes establishing a narrative framework. For this, Kazin lays out four recurring elements, which he refers to as “the durable frame”.

The first element is the idea of “Americanism”. Americanism calls upon American Exceptionalism and plays on the mythical values that Americans are taught to uphold. Its values rule according to the will of the people and opportunity for all who work hard. It is important to note here that Americanism is ascriptive; it devotes its attention largely to people who are white, male, Protestant, and native born, calling upon some of the cultural values that are discussed in greater detail in my later section “The Context for a Neoliberal World”. This characteristic highlights one of the ways in which Populism can be exclusive to people outside a certain group. Americanism is essential in setting apart American Populism. As Kazin notes, “There have, of course, been populisms in the history of other nations... but populism in the United States has made the unique claim that the powers that be are transgressing the nation's founding creed, which every permanent resident should honor. In this sense, American populism binds even as it divides” (Kazin 2). The narrative invoked by American Populists is empty without this fundamental value at the heart of it. The story cannot be told without Americanism.

The second tenet of American Populism that Kazin discusses is that of “The People”, an idea that is recurrent in most definitions of Populism. In American Populism, this invocation can

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<sup>9</sup> Kazin focuses on defining American Populism, rather than compiling a definition in general terms. I use his definition because it is thorough and is specific enough to be useful in examining the 2016 election.

refer to numerous identities: The Sovereign People (“We the People”); the Common People, who are neither poor nor wealthy, but are people who can rely on common sense; the Producers, or laborers and those who produce value<sup>10</sup>; and Real Americans, a group of people who are viewed as “protectors of Americanism”. There are other potential invocations, but in the American version of Populism, these tend to be the most common. In their effort to define Populism for their work *Rise of the Trumpenvolk: Populism in the 2016 Election*, J. Eric Oliver and Wendy M. Rahn argue that “This construction of a ‘we’ is facilitated also by the invocation of the people's enemies, both internal and external--the “people” often come to know who they are by who they are not” (Oliver and Rahn 191). There are several important implications based on this reality. First, it helps us to understand how xenophobia and nativism often get caught up in the thrust of Populism. References to “the people” invariably mean “white people”, an implicit racialization that should be understood to be infused in most narrative invocations of Populism. Second, the idea of the people understanding who they are by who they are not highlights how Populism can be exclusive: some people are more worthy of being heard and represented than others. Without the definition of ‘them’, there can be no ‘us’. Populists like Donald Trump would exploit tensions surrounding immigration within this framework, utilizing white nativist anxieties to help define “the people”

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<sup>10</sup> This invocation is explicitly not Marxist. Populists may, in some cases, espouse similar values to Marxists, but Populist invocations rarely call for class consciousness or the eradication of the Capitalist state or the ruling class.

and to craft a Populist message. Oliver and Rahn also tangle with reality that most politicians in democracies tend to align themselves with ‘the people’. They contend that this may be true,

But populists do more than simply paint themselves on the side of the majority; they make populist rhetoric the center of their campaigns. Anti-elitism and collectivism are the sine qua non of their political existence. Their whole purpose is to challenge the dominant order and give voice to the collective will, goals that are infused with a *sense of urgency by proclaiming that a crisis exists*. (Oliver and Rahn 191) [Emphasis mine.]

The third element of Populism refers to “the Elite”, the force that Populists are combatting. The Elite are often portrayed as wealthy and privileged. They can be viewed as “unproductive parasites”, or people who are dependent on the labor of others. They are portrayed as un-American or anti-American; people who are hostile to the basic values of America. Populist invocations frequently decry Plutocrats as undeserving usurpers of the people’s power. The Elite is understood to be a corrupting presence, a force that is weakening Americanism and threatening the Republic.

Finally, Kazin describes a synthesis of the first three elements in the Story of Politics. Simply, the American Populists invoke a specific story of a struggle between the People and the Elites to “take our country back” and restore the promise of Americanism. This Populist narrative is not a Marxist telling of the story of politics. It is not espousing revolution and does not seek the

overthrow of the state. *The Story of Politics* is the confluence of the other elements that Kazin discusses and is essential to understanding what Populism is.

Through a synthesis of Kazin's definition and the supplemental work of Mudde and Kaltwasser, I gain concrete terminology to use from here on out. Breaking down Populism into simple, workable terms, I define Populism as a kind of political narrative or rhetorical vehicle that is employed to mobilize and energize the "people" *at a time of crisis or perceived crisis* to take on the "elite" who are viewed as being either responsible for the crisis or being responsible for personally profiting from the crisis. Both Sanders and Trump employ this narrative in different ways. I will examine the details in a moment, but for now, understand that I consider Sanders' brand of Populism to be anti-Capitalist, a philosophy that contrasts Neoliberalism's doctrine of Free Market Capitalism, and Trump's brand of Populism to be anti-Globalist, a philosophy at odds with the Globalist element of Neoliberalism<sup>11</sup>. I will speak more on the specifics of these ideas in a moment. First, I want to make a note about the concept of Producerism.

### *Notes on Producerism*

Understanding Producerism is an essential step toward understanding a large part of Populist narratives (especially those on the right-wing of the political spectrum). Producerism is

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<sup>11</sup> Note that, while I focus on economic factors here, Populism is not a singularly economic phenomenon. It similarly concerns itself with cultural issues and values. The context for this discussion of Neoliberal economic issues carries with it specific cultural values and ideas that will be laid out in my section "The Context for a Neoliberal World".

itself a confluence of some of the elements of the Populist narrative that provides an insight into how many define “the people”.

Producerism is a type of messaging utilized by groups like the Tea Party and Populist leaders like Donald Trump. Producerism is at once a method of scapegoating and a tool for the Populist to define their audience. It is primarily a confluence of the elements of Americanism and the definition of “the people”. In a Producer narrative, there are several different kinds of people. The Producer narrative still recognizes the plight of the people against the elite, but it is also focused on delineating between the *deserving* and *undeserving*. As the Tea Party would define it, this separates regular people into two categories: the “makers and the takers” (Judis 56). The “makers”, or the “Producers”, are the productive members of society; the average people who put in honest work and try their hardest. They represent the quintessential American man (and it is usually a man) who has common sense and adheres to the fundamental values of Americanism. These makers are putting in honest work but are being squeezed by the rest of the system. In a Producer narrative, both the Elite and the “takers” are the villain. The takers are the underclass of ‘the people’ that are just as parasitic as the Elite. Through their acceptance of public benefits that they are “undeserving” of, they are seen as squeezing the makers who are just trying to get on.

As one can see, this narrative of Producerism plays on the natural divisions of the different elements of American Populism and expands the scope of targeting for a Populist. Additionally, it shows clearly how Populism can be very exclusive to those outside the fixed definition of the people. Right-wing Populists that focus on scapegoating the immigrant or welfare classes of a society regularly invoke the narrative of Producerism to signal to their base that they are the good, honest people who are being caught (much like a vise-grip) between the pressures of the undeserving poor, who squeeze the makers by accepting public benefits paid for through taxation,

and the parasitic Elite, who are either attacking the common people politically or assaulting them economically. The Producer narrative is invoked to stoke fears about already hated classes in order to get a base riled up to fight back. The Producer narrative is an extremely effective tool that sees invocations both by politicians trying to lay claim to explicitly Populist narratives and by regular politicians who see its message as a useful tool for accomplishing a certain policy goal. This concept is essential to understand the broader concept of Populism.

### *When Does Populism Work?*

Populism, regardless of our feelings toward it, is an ever-present undercurrent in political society. As Mudde and Kaltwasser note, "... populism is a moral and Manichean discourse that exists in society regardless of the presence of populist actors. Whether one likes it or not, many citizens interpret political reality through the lens of populism" (Mudde and Kaltwasser 97). As a method of framing issues and defining political narratives, it isn't something that can be easily eradicated. Instead of focusing on eradicating it, then, it is better to focus on understanding when and why prospective politicians invoke the framing of Populism to make appeals to the populace.

For a political message to succeed, the public must be primed to receive it. Populism, as a political narrative, is no exception. Mudde and Kaltwasser note that "[Populist narratives are] set in motion when the perception is widespread that threats to the very existence of society are present. This is why major policy failures, such as dramatic economic downturns and, above all, disclosures of cases of systematic corruption can work as a catalyst for populist attitudes among the population" (Mudde and Kaltwasser 100). These kinds of policy failures, Harvey, Barrett, and

Judis would argue, are evident in the rise of such issues as income inequality. Mudde and Kaltwasser continue to note that a feeling that the government is unresponsive to the demands of the people is an additional contributing factor to the rise and success of Populism (Mudde and Kaltwasser 101). Major corruption scandals (especially systemic corruption) are “fertile breeding grounds” for Populist sentiment (Mudde and Kaltwasser 110). These kinds of policy failures and scandals create demand for a Populist to come along and rail against the corruption of those at the top. It is in these perceived times of crisis that Populists can most effectively communicate their narrative. Mudde and Kaltwasser bring this point home: “In other words, whether populist actors become successful in terms of electoral strength, agenda-setting, or policy impact is strongly related to their ability to develop a credible narrative of crisis” (Mudde and Kaltwasser 106). This understanding of Populism as borne out of times of crisis<sup>12</sup> is central to my definition and understanding of Populism.

### ***Populism on the Left and Right and How Trump and Sanders Fit the Mold***

The definition of Populism is further complicated by the reality that there is no pure archetype for it. Populism on the right- and left-wings manifests in very different ways. Both political angles offer complex variations on an already convoluted narrative. As such, the central ideas of each manifestation and some related examples should be laid out.

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<sup>12</sup> Or perceived crisis; the crisis can be real or manufactured so long as the Populist is capable of selling their message as credible.

To start, let's examine left-wing (or "Progressive") Populism. Progressive Populists challenge existing social hierarchies in the name of the "common man", an invocation of "the People". Progressive Populists tend to focus on economic issues. Their vision is more inclusive and optimistic, often projecting a more egalitarian future. Though their rhetoric is more inclusive than that of right-wing Populists, they still often fail to call out race and gender oppression.

There have been numerous examples of Progressive Populists throughout history. One of the first Populist movements in the U.S. was the People's Party in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century: Their calls for a graduated income tax, the nationalization of the railroads, and the reworking of the gold standard to include both silver and gold showcase the economic and egalitarian aims of Progressive Populists. Their focus on agrarian issues (most of which tended to deal solely with white, land-owning and often Protestant males), however, shows the limits of Progressive Populism. The Labor Movements throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century also showcase a brand of Progressive Populism focused on economics. The Civil Rights Movement and the New Left in the 1950s and 60s provide good examples of Progressive Populists moving more toward acknowledgement of social and cultural issues. The final two examples are the Occupy Wall Street movement and the candidacy of Bernie Sanders for U.S. President in 2016<sup>13</sup>, both of which offered explicit criticisms of economic inequality through the lens of income inequality.

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<sup>13</sup> For more detailed information on all of these movements and the ones discussed in the next section, refer to Michael Kazin's *The Populist Persuasion* and John B. Judis' *The Populist Explosion*.

Right-wing Populism, by contrast, tends to focus on a more oppressive narrative. Right-wing Populists combine anti-Elite scapegoating with efforts to maintain or intensify systems of social privilege and power. Their message tends to be more disruptive, Kazin argues, as they frequently deflect popular discontent away from positive social change. Their definitions of the People are less inclusive; some are “more American” than others. In their narrative, they stigmatize the oppressed as “unproductive”. Their rhetoric is often prone to xenophobia, nativism, racism, and anti-Semitism. They tend to characterize the Elite as excessively tolerant of un-American values like political correctness or multiculturalism. This elite is often defined in cultural or political terms rather than economic ones. Finally, right-wing Populist tend to encourage the oppression of those who don’t fit the picture of ‘Real Americanism’.

There are plenty of examples of this kind of scapegoat-heavy Populism in U.S. history. The Know-Nothing Party, for example, operated on nativist and xenophobic political messaging that targeted immigrants and Catholics in the 1850s. The Prohibition movement and WASP moral hegemony in the 1920s, additionally, are prime examples of the tendency of right-wing Populists to look down their nose at values that they perceive as incorrect. Father Coughlin’s anti-Semitic rhetoric in the 1930s showcased the hateful side of this story of politics. Cold War anti-Communism showcased the tendency of right-wing Populists to play to base fears and a story of un-Americanism. The Conservative anti-government Populism of Nixon, Reagan, and, more recently, the Tea Party highlight the anti-Elite values that are harbored in anti-government

sentiment. In more recent years, the Patriot Militia movement has shown the extremely ugly and brutal side of violent right-wing Populism. Finally, and most importantly for this paper, Donald Trump's candidacy perfectly showcases the exploitation of a story of un-Americanism and foreign values ruining our society for the middle class.

Bernie Sanders, as mentioned, fits the mold of a Progressive Populist. In this paper, I understand him as an anti-Capitalist Populist focused on targeting economic issues related to Neoliberalism. Donald Trump, by contrast, is a right-wing Populist. Throughout this paper, I consider him to be an anti-Globalist Populist who is focused on Political Populism and issues of identity and nationalism. Both Sanders and Trump used their campaigns to define specific Elites to target – in Sanders' case, the billionaire class and Wall Street, in Trump's case, the immigrant class and the political elite, especially liberals – and the “people” that they wanted to appeal to based on these narratives. As Populists, they also outlined specific crises that they viewed as pressuring the “people”. Based on Harvey, Barrett, and Judis' argumentation, the crisis that Sanders' exploited would be the issue of income inequality, while the crisis that Trump focused on was immigration and other issues related to globalism. Throughout this paper, I work to determine whether these were the narratives that their voters were most attracted to. First, I will define the key issues that will help me determine what Trump and Sanders' style of Populism was and what issues their voters were most interested in being addressed. I do this in order to determine an answer to the hypothesis that Neoliberalism was the primary catalyst for the success of these

Populists. Before going about this task, I provide some context for the argument about Neoliberalism providing a catalyst for Populism.

### **The Context for a Neoliberal World**

As with any ideology, Neoliberalism did not come out of a vacuum. Its ideas were built on the backs of a burgeoning global culture and decades of economic experimentation. It is also, importantly, not a singularly economic ideology. It carries with it implicit assumptions about the world and the way that it works. Its defining motto of “Individual Liberty”, for instance, harkens back to cultural battlegrounds that have been prominent in the American psyche for at least a century. Thoroughly Libertarian, it prizes not only economic freedom, but religious and political freedoms as well. To understand Neoliberalism, then, one needs a solid understanding of the world in which it was founded. I will limit this discussion for the sake of brevity, but there are a few very important points that need to be made and understood before moving forward.

In order to supplement my argument about Neoliberalism, I address here the ethno-cultural elements of America that shaped and defined the world in which Neoliberalism bloomed. Among these elements are the topics of race and religion. I will refer to several works which carry with them the implicit reference to theories that help to give context for this discussion. As I will be providing mostly summary information, these works should be used to fill in the gaps where there are questions.

#### ***Religion and Capitalism***

Few could argue the weight of the religious debate that has gripped America for centuries. In his book *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*, Kevin

Kruse provides some clarity about the history of that debate. The primary argument in his book centers on understanding the religious revival of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century as an orchestrated effort by America's business community to discredit New Deal politics with a biblical argument (Kruse ix-xvi). A thorough account, Kruse's book showcases how corporate leaders, frustrated by Labor Movement gains and an administration friendly to Labor, came to the conclusion that converting Americans to their side and to their view of economics would be possible almost solely through a reclamation of Christian thought. At the time of the New Deal, Christian leaders were largely preaching the doctrine of the Common Good, praising welfare and collective governance as the salvation of the people. Corporate leaders, however, figured they could convert conservative clergymen to their side by preaching the gospel as a doctrine of individual responsibility. With their "Freedom Under God" ideology in tow, efforts to redefine the national religion as one of "Christian Libertarianism" began<sup>14</sup>. Through men like Reverend James W. Fifield Jr. and programs like Spiritual Mobilization and Religion in American Life (RIAL), corporate leaders disseminated their Christian Libertarian messages to schoolchildren, clergymen, radio listeners, moviegoers, political leaders, and everyone in between (Kruse, 1-34 127-161).

Their success was substantial. By 1952, religious and corporate leaders rejoiced in their election of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, a man whose victory was "nothing less than a mandate for a national religious revival" (Kruse ix). The movement also succeeded in establishing the phrase "In God We Trust" on all paper currency and the phrase "One Nation Under God" in our Pledge of Allegiance (the movement also established the Pledge) and as our national motto (Kruse 99). All told, the business community drove up church attendance from 36% in 1900 to

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<sup>14</sup> For more detailed information, refer to chapters 1 through 3 in *One Nation Under God* by Kevin Kruse.

69% at the end of the 1950s (Kruse xv). Their crusade proved religious nationalism an effective tool for getting their way.

Importantly for this project, their movement successfully diverted the trajectory of American politics away from Social Democracy and toward Libertarian non-interventionism and small-government ideology. Men like Fifield “saw Christianity and capitalism as inextricably intertwined and argued that spreading the gospel of one required spreading the gospel of the other” (Kruse 8). In their efforts, they made that link abundantly clear: appeals against “godless Communism” were direct references to the belief in an America as fundamentally religious as it was capitalist. Their movement helped to establish the value of free markets and the focus on small government that came to dominate Neoliberal discussions in later decades. As such, the American variant of Neoliberalism bears with it implicit cultural assumptions about religious nationalism that would at first appear unrelated. It is this intrinsic relationship between American Capitalism, or Neoliberalism, and religion that must be understood as implicit throughout the rest of this discussion. Though this link is surely established by Kruse’s work, it is important to note that Christianity and Christians are not a monolith. There are a good many Christians that still believe in a more socially conscious religious doctrine and plenty of Christians that would never associate their religion with any kind of political or economic ideology. This discussion of religion and Capitalism is therefore limited, but it is still an important point of background information.

### ***“Deservingness” and Race in Politics***

Beyond religion, the elements of race and racism in American political development cannot be ignored. As political scientists Desmond S. King and Rogers M. Smith argue in their piece for the American Political Science Review titled “Racial Orders in American Political Development”, we do a disservice to our work if we do not consider race in dissecting political issues. Through

their effort, they uncover two competing racial orders that have, throughout the course of American history, been in tension to dominate the direction of political thought. They term these two competing racial orders a “white supremacist” order and an “egalitarian transformative” order (King and Smith 1). They elaborate on the historical context of these two, walking through times in our history when either one has been the dominant philosophy. They examine how these two schools have shaped political debates, the development of our institutions, and the direction of our political and social arguments. Importantly, they note that “This ‘racial orders’ thesis rejects claims that racial injustices are aberrations in America, for it elaborates how the nation has been pervasively constituted by systems of racial hierarchy since its inception” (King and Smith 1). Their argument is important for providing background context for the development of all schools of American thought, and thus has implicit applications to all political science research.

Though I want to leave most of their argumentation to their paper, I do want to cite a few points that are especially relevant to my discussion. Throughout the course of this paper, I will necessarily touch on the topic of immigration and relate it to both Populism and Neoliberalism. Before doing so, I want to use the work of King and Smith to explain some of the racial context that any analysis of immigration policy inherently carries with it.

One key point that King and Smith make is that domestic race issues are often analyzed separately from immigration policy. Scholars focus on economic, political, cultural, and institutional arguments when they analyze immigration policy, but frequently leave out the context of race. King and Smith argue, however, that this is an intellectually dishonest approach to this kind of analysis. In the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the 1924 Johnson-Reed Immigration Act “establishing race-based national origins criteria”, and the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952, they see that “domestic racial institutions and their proponents have interacted profoundly

with immigration policy” (King and Smith 14). Furthermore, they cite Supreme Court decisions “upholding naturalization preferences for whites to maintain the vision of the United States as an essentially white country” (King and Smith 15). To bring the point home, they note that

Some white supremacists saw in immigration policy a chance to achieve greater national 'whitening' and even contemplated the removal of all African Americans from the United States via either forcible or voluntary emigration. A bill passed by the Senate in 1914 but rejected by the House, after intense NAACP lobbying, sought to exclude all black immigrants and to permit the exclusion of African Americans who traveled abroad. (King and Smith 15)

All these cases bring to light a fundamentally racist undercurrent driving American immigration policy, an element that King and Smith argue is unjustly ignored in analysis of these types of policy. In citing these cases, they show that race is an inescapable element in American political development, and thus one that is criminally underrepresented in political science research.

I also want to touch on another important concept in all of politics: the idea of “deservingness”. Deservingness is an especially pertinent concept to this discussion because of its relationship to Populism. Populists often use the idea of deservingness to scapegoat the poor and immigrant classes. For this discussion, I cite the work of Christopher Ellis and Christopher Faricy in their article *Race, 'Deservingness,' and Social Spending Attitudes: The Role of Policy Delivery Mechanism*. In their article, they make the case that

This ‘deservingness heuristic’ undergirds how citizens make sense of social policy: above and beyond cultural or partisan predispositions, citizens wish to bestow government aid on those perceived as unlucky or working to better themselves and wish to withhold benefits

from those perceived as lazy or unsympathetic. Citizens' attitudes towards government programs are, in other words, heavily influenced by perceptions of beneficiaries' deservingness. (Ellis and Faricy 6)

Importantly, the idea of deservingness is implicitly racialized. Ellis and Faricy cite as an example the idea that many white Americans view African Americans as less committed to the strong work ethic that, in part, defines Americanism (Ellis and Faricy 6). They argue that it is this perception that leads to the belief that African Americans are less deserving of government aid (Ellis and Faricy 6). This racial understanding of deservingness is essential for understanding two key concepts in Populism, as outlined in the "Defining Populism" section of this paper: "Americanism" and "Producerism". Both the idea of Americanism and Producerism carry implicit racial assumptions as defined by Americans' understanding of deservingness. As previously discussed, Americanism carries an ascriptive, mostly white and male definition of "American". Producerism uses that same definition to determine who is "deserving". Those racial elements are invoked whenever these narratives are employed. With this background understanding of religion and race in American politics and Populism, then, it is time to move on to discussing some key variables that will help me test Harvey, Barrett, and Judis' claims.

### *Populism in a Burgeoning Neoliberal America*

To understand the argumentation laid forth by Harvey, Barrett, and Judis, it is essential to have the context of how Neoliberalism rose in America. This paper does not have the space to accommodate a full discussion of this topic, so rather than retreading work that has come before, I want to make note here briefly of the way that Harvey, Barrett, and Judis see the agenda as progressing. I also want to lay out a few key policies that have come out of the rise of Neoliberalism without going too far into the details to allow for more background context on some of the

discussion in this paper. Barrett and Harvey's books provide the primary historical walkthrough for understanding the rise of Neoliberalism, so make note here that they should be consulted for further reading on this topic.

There are several important points along the road to Neoliberalism as we know it today. Barrett sees four administrations as being key to the rise of Neoliberalism in the U.S.: Ronald Reagan's, Bill Clinton's, George W. Bush's, and Barack Obama's. There are a few key points to refer to for this project. First, Reagan's policy of communing with corporate think tanks like the American Legislative Council (ALEC) and Heritage Foundation to promote business interests and his work deregulating the economy in favor of such interests provided a key stepping stone for the rise of income inequality (Barrett 25-32). Second, Clinton's work passing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) helped to deregulate and free up the movement of capital while other policies of his administration tightened border security and reduced the freedom of movement of people, a contradiction that led to outsourcing and further loss of worker protections and led to job losses for American manufacturing (Barrett 77-85). Third, Bush's tax cuts helped to shore up returns for wealthy corporations and further exacerbated income inequality (Barrett 103-105). Finally, Obama's policies of bailing out the banks after the financial crash, furthering free-trade agreements, and expanding surveillance on U.S. soil contributed to income inequality and outsourcing and led to greater pessimism about the economy and the corruption of the government (Barrett 138-159). It is important to understand these issues, even superficially, to understand the connection that these authors see between these policies and the rise of income inequality and nationalist sentiment.

In addition to understanding how Neoliberalism arose in America, it is important to take a brief look at some of the Populist movements that have arisen over the last several decades as

Neoliberalism has grown. The primary purpose for exploring these movements is to outline the logic for the argument that anti-Neoliberalism has been an undercurrent in American society for some time now. In Barrett's and Judis' telling especially, these movements are seen as precursors to the rise of Sanders and Trump and highlight how Populists have made anti-Neoliberal claims over the years. It is their view that such movements highlight burgeoning anti-Neoliberal sentiment in America and show how and why Populists like Sanders and Trump could come to enjoy such support. This is, again, a brief synopsis of complex topics, so please consult Judis', Barrett's, and Harvey's texts as well as Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson's *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* for more detailed accounts of these movements and how they meet the definition of Populist and these authors' archetypes of anti-Neoliberalism.

First, the campaigns of Ross Perot and Pat Buchanan in the mid-1990s provide an interesting blueprint for Populists campaigning on anti-Neoliberal issues. Ross Perot, for instance, spoke out against NAFTA and runaway trade deals and called for a reigning in of corporate financing of elections (Judis 47-53). In Judis' words, "[Ross Perot] and his vote represented the first clear repudiation of the neoliberal agenda" (Judis 51). Pat Buchanan, meanwhile, campaigned against transnational corporations and globalism and became the first candidate in the race to single out illegal immigration, even promising to stop immigration altogether (Judis 52-53). Both Perot and Buchanan spoke out against corruption and repudiated free trade deals and globalization that had led to outsourcing, showcasing their own styles of anti-Neoliberal Populism. The Tea Party is a little more complicated to understand, but they are still important to examine. They harped on heavily Producerist themes, raging about society being divided into the "makers" and "takers" and painting minorities and immigrants as part of the parasitic freeloaders who made up the latter category (Skocpol and Williamson 7-75). They railed against immigration and made

frequent refrains about “taking our country back”, harping on nationalistic views to promote slashing public funding and curbing public sector unions. In Judis’ telling, they “attacked neoliberalism from the far right” in reaction to Obama’s policies of bailing out the big banks and passing healthcare reform (Judis 55). In many ways, they laid the groundwork for the nationalistic views of Trump and his supporters. Finally, Occupy Wall Street provided a Populist account from the left. Framing issues as contained within the framework of the “99% vs. the 1%”, they savaged Wall Street and the rate of income inequality in the U.S. (Barrett 143-146; Judis 59-61). Their Economic Populism held striking similarities to the anti-Capitalist refrains of Sanders’ campaign.

These movements help to provide background context on what recent Populist movements in America have looked like and highlight the similarities between a lot of these movements. The focus of these movements on issues like immigration and income inequality highlight the undercurrent of those issues in American society and point to the plausibility of argumentation focused on these anti-Neoliberal complaints as major catalysts for Populist support. Now, I turn to examining the issues of income inequality and immigration and globalism more closely.

### **Key Issues and Variables**

In order to examine empirically the hypothesis set forth by Harvey, Barrett, and Judis, I need some specific variables to measure over the last several decades of Neoliberalism’s presence. To accomplish this task, I have chosen to focus on several key consequences and policies that Neoliberalism has created and track public opinion regarding these issues. For this effort, I focus on two key issues and variables: 1) the rapid rise of income inequality and 2) globalization and variables related to immigration, including the practice of outsourcing labor to other countries, the

use of illegal immigrants for cheap labor, and the role of trade<sup>15</sup>. I will first examine the logic of how these are related to Neoliberalism in order to see whether there are grounds for legitimate argumentation that these variables correlate to the rise of Neoliberalism so that I may move on to test their impact on the 2016 election.

### *Income Inequality*

It may be difficult to remember such a time, but in the 1970s (and for three decades prior), the top 1% in America only controlled about 8% of the total wealth. Quoting historians Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore, Barrett makes the point that “The year 1972 [was] the most egalitarian year in US history... Unemployment was at historic lows, and earnings were at their all-time high for male wage earners, having climbed an astonishing forty percent since 1960” (Barrett 138). This couldn’t last, though. During the 1970s, a “crisis of capital accumulation affected everyone through the combination of rising unemployment and accelerating inflation” (Harvey 14). That reality presented a very real political threat to the wealthy class. In response, Harvey argues, they rallied their forces around the doctrine of Neoliberalism. After Neoliberal policies were first implemented in the late 1970s, “the share of the top 1 per cent of income earners in the US soared, to reach 15 per cent... by the end of the century” (Harvey 16). During that same period, Barrett indicates, “Individually, the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans, on average, saw their incomes double or triple... while a typical worker actually made less in 2011 than in 1968 (adjusted for

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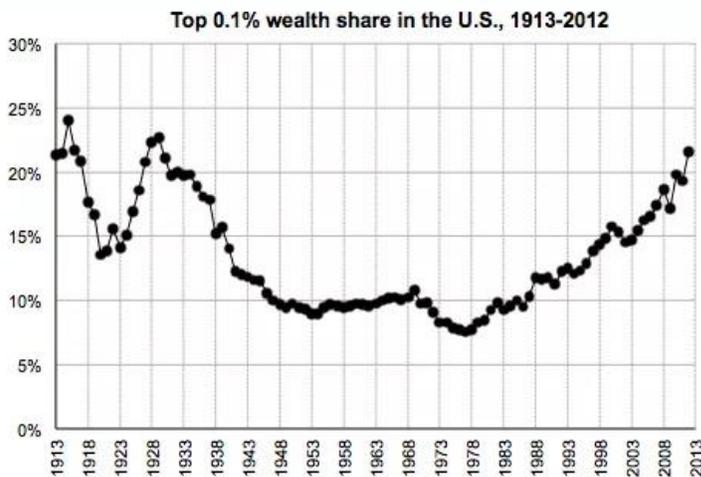
<sup>15</sup> I initially designed this portion of my research with the intention of also focusing on the role of the Great Recession and the rise of corporate financing of elections in America, but ultimately came to the conclusion that these variables unnecessarily muddied the equation. I instead chose to focus on the two variables that I believe to be most related to Sanders’ and Trump’s campaigns. I make note here that I do believe that the Great Recession and corporate lobbying are key variables worth discussion, but leave them to future research. Harvey’s, Barrett’s, and Judis’ text all go into detail on how these topics are related to Neoliberalism and go further to lay out the logic of how they relate these topics to the rise of Populism. A curious reader should consult these works, but acknowledge that those variables will not have been empirically tested as income inequality and globalization are here.

inflation). As a group, the richest 1 percent of Americans roughly doubled both their share of the nation's income (to 20 percent) and their share of the nation's wealth (to 40 percent)” (Barrett 4). Barrett continues to note that bubbles in the housing and ‘dot-com’ markets, combined with the results of Clinton-era policies, led to a rise in corporate profits by 88% during the 1990s and a related rise in CEO pay at a rate of 463% (Barrett 81).

During the same period, U.S. manufacturing lost 1/6<sup>th</sup> of its total jobs, resulting in American workers with college degrees competing directly with Mexican counterparts, forcing a 12% wage decline. Neither Barrett nor Harvey were particularly surprised by such results. Barrett sees the expansion of economic inequality as a direct result of Neoliberalism, arguing that, through its policies of transferring public resources into a few private hands, accomplished through tax cuts, deregulation, and privatization, Neoliberalism provided “tremendous benefits for some people and horrific consequences for many others” (Barrett 159).

All this combined to create the highest levels of inequality the U.S. has ever experienced. In the modern day, the 1% controls roughly 90% of total wealth, as opposed to the 1%’s share of 8% of the wealth in the 1970s (Harvey 14). Harvey expresses concern over this reality, stating that “... when income and wealth inequalities reach a point - as they have today - close to that which preceded the crash of 1929, then the economic imbalances become so chronic as to be in danger of generating a structural crisis” (Harvey 188-189). It is important to note that Harvey’s book, published in 2005, was writing about the crisis then. Inequality has been steadily rising. Figure 1: “Back to the Roaring 1920s” from economists Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman highlights this trend from 1913 to 2013 for the top 0.1% of Americans (Saez and Zucman).

## Back to the roaring 1920s



The American Political Science Association (APSA), in their journal *Perspectives on Politics*, highlight the consequences of such inequality in the article “American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality<sup>16</sup>. In the paper, they contend that “Our country’s

ideals of equal citizenship and responsive government may be under growing threat in an era of persistent and rising inequalities” (“American Democracy” 651). Importantly, they consider that many other nations like the U.S. have seen similar social and economic changes, but “comparative research... indicates that the policies pursued by various governments matter. Regulations, tax policy, and social programs, for example, have been successfully used elsewhere to buffer market-generated increases in socioeconomic inequalities” (“American Democracy” 654). This is important because the implication is that the provision of a social safety net backed by policies meant to reign in the consequences of unfettered Capitalism could have helped mitigate the rise in inequality. The logical conclusion is that policies less concerned with deregulation and tax cuts, as Neoliberalism is, might have helped avoid such a crisis. This strongly suggests that Harvey might be on to something in tying the rise in income inequality to the practice of Neoliberalism. The crisis created by this reality, as outlined by Harvey, Barrett, and the APSA also ties Neoliberalism

<sup>16</sup> I will use only summary statistics here; except for the preliminary discussion on the rise in inequality and its ties to Neoliberalism, I will not walk out the details. Please refer to this paper or Harvey’s, Barrett’s, or Judis’ books for more detailed information on the phenomenon.

to a potential Populist backlash, given that the presence of a crisis presents an opportunity to exploit it rhetorically. To see whether this argument holds water, I now turn to examining Americans' feelings toward income inequality to try to understand empirically if it might be a variable that led to a rise in Populist sentiment.

Specific feelings about income inequality, measured in feelings toward the fairness of the distribution of wealth and money in the country, do not reflect much change over the last several decades. In his analysis of polling data for Gallup, Frank Newport found that, while a strong majority of Americans think that wealth and money should be more evenly distributed (63%), that figure hasn't changed much from 1985, when it sat at 60%. Similarly, the figure has not changed, save for some fluctuations over the years, for the percentage of people who think the distribution is fair: in 2015, that number was 31%, in 1985, it was the same (Gallup 2015). This finding is consistent with the explanation that Oliver and Rahn, in their article *Rise of the Trumpenvolk*, put forth for the drops in confidence toward government responsiveness found in the mid-90s and in 2016 (Oliver and Rahn 195). In their paper, they find no correlation with objective economic measures like unemployment or median household income or subjective measures like feelings toward the economy. Similarly, they conclude that income inequality, as a variable, does not predict such drops in confidence toward government responsiveness, the variable that they view as most correlated with the rise in Populism.

There are, however, some indications that income inequality is an issue in the back of voters' minds – at least indirectly. For example, two separate questions from a Gallup poll in 2016 – one asking what issue the voter was most interested in having the next president address and the other asking what the most important issue facing our country today is – saw “the economy” (19% and 17%) as the number one issue (“Presidential Election 2016”). Importantly, the first question

also saw 6% answer “wages/ earning a decent wage/ decline of middle class” and another 6% say “jobs/ unemployment” (“Presidential Election 2016”). A 2015 report from the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) shows similar results, finding that 60% say jobs and unemployment are critically important issues (the partisan breakdown shows unity on this issue – 66% of Democrats and 59% of Republicans considered these issues critically important) (Cooper et al. 2015). Though these are general answers that lack nuance, they do indicate an interest in economic issues that can be at least tenuously related to income inequality. Further findings from the PRRI study also seem to indicate that Oliver and Rahn may be too quick to declare the impotence of income inequality as a variable. Interestingly, 77% said that corporations were not paying a fair share of their proceeds to employees (Cooper et al. 2015). Similarly, the PRRI report showed Americans growing increasingly pessimistic about equal opportunity. In 2010, 53% said that one of the biggest problems in the nation was that we don’t give everyone an equal chance in life and 41% said it wasn’t that big of a problem. By 2015, those figures had risen and fallen to 65% and 28% respectively (Cooper et al. 2015).

At the base level, considering income inequality as a concept itself for a variable doesn’t seem as useful as examining related issues and comparing their rise and fall. There are several indications that it is still an interesting and useful variable, though, regardless of Oliver and Rahn’s objections. It is of interest, for instance, that there is a rather large partisan divide on the issue. The PRRI report found that 48% overall considered it a critical issue, but 62% of Democrats and only 29% of Republicans answered in such a way (Cooper et al. 2015). Such findings suggest that income inequality might have been a potent Populist catalyst for Democrats and liberals while simultaneously having little draw for Republicans. Examining specific issues that pertain to income inequality, like the minimum wage, seems also to bear this out. 59% of all Americans

favored raising the federal minimum wage to \$15, breaking down to 32% for the GOP and a massive 84% for Democrats (Cooper et al. 2015).

There are other related questions that complicate the narrative. When the Associated Press asked about the government's response to income inequality in September 2016, 54% said that it had not gone far enough and only 7% said that it had gone too far ("Associate Press" 2016). Interestingly, 25% also said that they "don't know", an unusually high number that indicates a lack of education on the topic. Of similar note is a poll from Pew in September 2016 that asked voters to choose what economic issue was the most important in their vote for president. In it, "the job situation" came first with 44% and "income inequality" came second with 38% ("Pew Research Center" 2016). While the nuances of the responses are left out of the statistical totals, it seems plausible to speculate that "the job situation" could be related to income inequality and minimum wage. Respondents might be concerned about unemployment but might similarly be concerned about finding jobs that pay well. To gain a more complete understanding of the impact of income inequality on voters in the 2016 election, then, it seems as though a different measure should be employed. The consistency of the number of Americans that think that wealth and income should be more evenly distributed (Again, 63% in 2015, 60% in 1985) does not seem to square with polls that find increasing dissatisfaction with the government's handling of the issue and with the profits that corporations make. The high rate of "don't know" responses – 25% - to the question about the government's response to income inequality also seems to indicate a lack of understanding of the topic. These disparate findings indicate that maybe the measure is faulty. Perhaps the question is confusing, or maybe voters don't truly understand what income inequality is. There is a better way to get a more definitive answer, though. By examining voters' views toward the minimum wage in a time series and comparing it to views about the amount of profits that corporations or CEOs

make and the fairness of the economic system, I can create a proxy for a measure about income inequality and ascertain a more clear picture of voters' opinions.

To start, let's look at support for raising the minimum wage. A 2013 piece from Lydia Saad for Gallup provides some interesting insight. In 2013, the idea of raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour was still a moonshot proposal, so Saad's piece does not focus on that wage increase. Instead, she looks at support for raising the federal minimum wage to \$9 an hour. She offers up an interesting time series chart that highlights support over recent years (Figure 2: Support for Raising U.S. Federal Minimum Wage – Recent Trends).

*Support for Raising U.S. Federal Minimum Wage -- Recent Trends*

See footnote for trend wordings

	<b>Favor/ Vote "for"</b>	<b>Oppose/ Vote "against"</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
2005 Nov 7-10	83	14	3
2000 Oct 25-28	82	16	2
1999 Apr 13-14	81	18	1
1996 Apr 25-28	83	15	2
1995 Feb 3-5	77	21	2

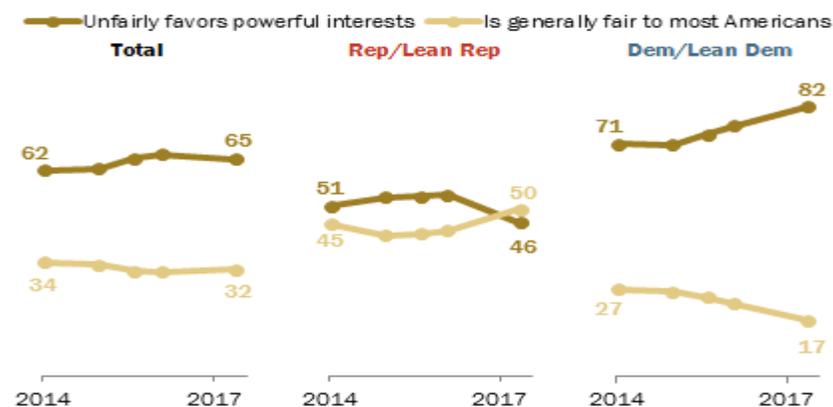
Right away, the chart shows an increase in support for this proposal over the years. In 2013, though, that support had fallen to about 71% (Saad 2013). That might seem like it was upsetting the trend, but Saad offers up the explanation that unemployment may have been causing uncertainty and anxiety that contributed to lower support for the issue. Still, the 2013 data paints a rather clear and interesting picture. 94% of liberals and 91% of Democrats, for example, supported raising the federal minimum wage (Saad 2013). 78% of all those 18-29 supported the increase. 54% of Conservatives and 50% of Republicans supported raising the minimum wage. 67% of those 65 and older had a favorable view of raising the minimum wage. These figures suggest that, while there is clear support across the board, there is much more reliable support

amongst liberals and the youth. This is an important finding because, as shall be seen shortly, this was the primary base for Bernie Sanders' support in 2016. Such high support suggest that his base may have been primed for messaging related to income inequality. Additionally, the 2015 finding from Cooper et al.'s study that showed 59% overall supporting a rise in the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, an idea that was too radical to even poll in 2013, highlights how much the minimum wage was becoming an issue for voters.

Next, I turn to polling on the amount of corporate profits made. Data from Pew is useful here. An October 2017 report entitled "Shifting Partisan Views of the Fairness of the U.S. Economic System" provides a time series of responses to statements about economic fairness and equality from the year 1994 to 2017. There are a few different measures of interest that it provides. While there are interesting trends overall, the data is most illuminating on a partisan basis. On views of the fairness of the economic system, for instance, Figure 3 shows a shorter time series from 2014 to 2017 but highlights how much Democrats and Republicans are split on the fairness of the economic system (Figure 3: Shifting Partisan Views of the Fairness of the U.S. Economic System).

### Shifting partisan views of the fairness of the U.S. economic system

% who say the economic system in this country ...



Note: Don't know responses not shown. Q51II.

Source: Survey conducted June 8-18 and June 27-July 9, 2017.

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This data paints a clear picture of a Democratic party increasingly disillusioned with the economic system. More data from this report clarifies this reality even further. Republicans are further split, for instance, on the idea of whether hard work

means that one can get ahead in America. Overall, 68% of voters in 1994 and 61% in 2017 said that “most people can make it if they work hard” (“Shifting Partisan Views” 2017). Looking at the partisan breakdown of that figure, 65% of Democrats agreed with that statement in 1994, but only 49% did in 2017. By this measure and the first question of fairness, the data shows a clear growing pessimism about the economy among Democrats. The last measure – whether business corporations make too much profit – seems to seal the deal. Overall, since 1994, the percentage of voters saying that business corporations make too much profit has risen from 52% to 59% in 2017 (“Shifting Partisan Views” 2017). The partisan difference is, once again, stark. That figure rose from 61% to 73% for Democrats and stayed at 43% for Republicans (with fluctuations over the years).

Though initial survey research could not provide a clear answer about trends in views toward income inequality, breaking the question down into the parts of views toward the minimum wage and views toward corporate profits and economic fairness seems to have painted a clearer picture. The trend overall reflects a growing desire for greater compensation and increasing pessimism about the economy, but that trend is far better represented amongst Democratic voters than Republicans. While this suggests that income inequality may not have been a driving factor for all voters in 2016, it does imply that Democratic voters may have been especially receptive to messaging about this issue. As such, it seems legitimate to move forward with examining Bernie Sanders’ supporters for concerns about this issue and seems appropriate to suggest that Sanders may have put forth a credible Populist message focused on income inequality. That discussion will come shortly, but first I turn to examining the issue of globalization and immigration.

### *Global Capitalism and Nativism*

The subject of global Neoliberalization is a rather broad one, covering such things as wars, trade, immigration, and refugee flows. I focused on a lot of these issues earlier in my section “Defining Neoliberalism”, so I don’t want to re-tread that ground now. Instead, I want to focus on one key factor: immigration. Specifically, I want to focus on the exploitation of undocumented immigrants for cheap labor (and the reactions to that) and what I shall call the “crisis of American Exceptionalism and identity”. By the latter variable, I refer to Harvey and Barrett’s idea that Neoliberalism’s economic and cultural dimensions work hand in hand - through things like wage stagnation and free trade agreements that portend an influx of immigrants and the “browning” of America – to create anxieties, whether they are justified or not, about the fundamental American identity, leading to upticks in nativism and xenophobia.

I think that the most important and telling aspect of this story is the business community’s role. Corporations, looking to stay competitive, have used free trade agreements and the doctrine of Neoliberal globalization in order to gain cheap labor from illegal immigrants and cheaper production from offshoring and outsourcing. Such acceptance by the business community of illegal immigration for its cheap labor leads to certain contradictions, however. For example, in 2010, the Arizona legislature passed Senate Bill (SB) 1070, a law that required law enforcement to prosecute immigration laws to their fullest extent, leading to the harassment and racial profiling of immigrants (Barrett 154). This obviously racialized bill was promoted by the likes of ALEC, whose members included the Corrections Corporation of America, a private prison company standing to gain from the increased detention of illegal immigrants (Barrett 154). At the same time, ALEC was busy promoting trade deals like NAFTA and the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) that have been shown to increase levels of immigration of all kinds (Barrett 154). Such contradictions

highlight the tension in the Neoliberal narrative from the corporate perspective, but I am more interested in the concerns of regular Americans.

This is where the cultural context discussed in “The Context for a Neoliberal World” most comes into play. The idea of American Exceptionalism has both an economic and cultural dimension. Economically, it espouses the idea that our economy should be the most productive and our workers should have the highest standard of living, an idea that is undermined by the wage stagnation generated as a result of Neoliberalism. Culturally, it has a fixed definition of American: mostly white, Anglo-Saxon with an emphasis on limited government and responsible choice. In the modern day, however, when globalism has led to a global community rich with multicultural ideas and practices, it’s becoming increasingly less clear that the kinds of things that were supposed to have made America exceptional in the past will continue to do so. That idea can be scary for some, and the anxieties presented are inherent in such proposals as Donald Trump’s border wall, which very literally tells the world that “we’re inside, you’re outside, and it will stay that way”. In essence, such a project would be a monument to Americans needing to feel exceptional and special.

Such tensions and contradictions should be observable in polling data. In order to gauge public opinion, then, I choose to test variables related to trade and offshoring, immigration and diversity, and the global role of the U.S. For this, I primarily rely on the PRRI report from 2015 and a Pew Research study from 2018 that tracks the roots of modern nationalism around the world.

Immediately, the data seems to bear fruit. The PRRI report, for instance, shows that in 2012, 74% said that corporate offshoring was a major cause of the nation’s economic issues, a number that rose to 86% in 2016 (Cooper et al. 2015). In a similar vein, the Pew study found that (in 2018, but the trend held steady from 2016) 49% of Americans viewed global economic engagement as a bad thing (Stokes 2018). The rest of the findings highlight a similarly isolationist

mindset. 57% of the U.S. said that the country should deal with its own problems; 46% said that the U.S. in 2016 was less important than it was 10 years ago. Only 41% said that the U.S. should help other countries deal with their problems while 54% said that the U.S. should focus on its own problems (and 70% of Trump supporters responded this way) (Stokes 2018). The ANES time series found similar trends, with the percentage of the U.S. saying that the country should not concern itself with world problems rising sharply from 20% in 2004 to 40% in 2012 and then falling slightly to 37% in 2016 (“The ANES Guide” 2017). All these trends reflect growing isolationist sentiment and heightened nationalism. The data on diversity also correlates with these findings, albeit only on a partisan basis. According to the Pew study, 47% of Republicans and 70% of Democrats said that immigrants make the U.S. a better place to live in 2018 (Stokes 2018). In 2016, 60% of Democrats and only 33% of Republicans said that immigrants strengthen the country with their hard work and talents, as compared with 32% and 30% respectively in 1994. Such findings corroborate Oliver and Rahn’s assertion that, in 2016, Republicans (and especially Trump supporters) were primed for nativist Populism (Oliver and Rahn 199-201). In their study, they found that Trump supporters were the most prone to feelings of social alienation and nativism and the most fearful of immigrants, all while scoring the highest for national affiliation (Oliver and Rahn 199-201).

There may be a partisan split, but the data are clear: nativism and isolationism have grown rapidly in the U.S. That nativism seems to have grown in the face of the “browning” of America, suggesting that there may be real feelings of a crisis of American identity. That crisis is ripe for exploitation for Populists who naturally provide an identity for their supporters. Where Democrats had income inequality, it appears that Republicans had immigration and globalism. In order to determine the relationship of this variable to real Populist rhetoric, I will come back to it later in

discussing the views of the supporters of Trump and his supporters. For now, I consider this variable tied to the consequences of Neoliberalism, and thus tied to anti-Neoliberal sentiment.

### **Populism and the 2016 Election Cycle**

The most pressing question that this project tries to get at, in simple terms, can be boiled down to two words: “Why now”? In *Rise of the Trumpenvolk: Populism in the 2016 Election*, Oliver and Rahn asked the same question and came to the conclusion “...that populism originates in a political source, namely, when existing political parties are not responding to the desires of large sections of the electorate. We call such conditions a ‘representation gap’” (Oliver and Rahn 194). This is a useful measure for this thesis because it provides a place to look for an explicit bridge between Neoliberalism and Populism. If voters perceive this representation gap, and Populism is truly and empirically present, then for Neoliberalism to be seen as the primary driving impetus, it must be linked to this representation gap. It seems plausible that examining the issues that voters supporting Trump and Sanders cared most about and searching for a connection to Neoliberal policies or consequences would provide an answer to this question.

Populists commonly frame themselves as “outsiders” seeking to offer alternatives to the political mainstream. Trump and Sanders were no different, but what is surprising is the degree to which the other candidates during the primaries also employed Populist rhetoric in an attempt to connect with voters.

Using questions about government responsiveness from sources like Pew Research Center, American National Election Studies, and Gallup, Oliver and Rahn set out to examine Populism in 2016 and the key components surrounding it. They take the presence of Populism for granted at the outset, citing several previous studies (Bonokowski and Gidron 2016, Hawkins 2009, Jagers

and Walgrave 2007, Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011, and Rooduijn 2014) to show that the overabundance of Populist rhetoric among *all* of the primary candidates can be quantitatively and empirically proven. The prevalence of Populist language is important to note because it signals the demand (or *perceived* demand) for such language in 2016. Outside of these external studies that they link, they also conduct their own regression analysis based upon the questions and tenets set forth by other surveyors. They primarily rely on the methodology of Bonokowski and Gidron, whose analysis of campaign speeches found “sharp differences between the political parties in terms of the content of the populist claims: Republicans were much more likely to critique political targets whereas Democrats concentrated on economic elites” - to guide their own content analysis of the speeches of each primary candidate (Oliver and Rahn 192). For this, they set up so-called ‘dictionaries’ of language wherein they define specific phrases that fall under the category of either “Political” or “Economic” Populism. They differentiate between the two by defining Political Populism as being targeted toward the system, special interests, and lobbyists (and any language that falls under the purview of those kinds of criticisms) and Economic Populism as targeting Wall Street, millionaires, the rich, and anything related to such topics. The word “elite” appeared in both dictionaries. This methodology allows them to examine each candidate and their specific Populist appeal and to understand what issues were received the best by each candidate’s base.

In addition to this measure of Populism among primary challengers, Oliver and Rahn also set out to examine “people's feelings toward the political process, experts and common wisdom, and attachment to an American identity” (Oliver and Rahn 196). To accurately gauge these undercurrents in American society, they measure three variables: Anti-Elitism (measured in questions like ‘people like me don’t have much power’ and other questions about the role of the elites and the wealthy in the political process), mistrust of experts (measured in questions like ‘I’d

rather trust ordinary people'), and national affiliation (measured in questions like 'I consider myself to be like other Americans'). I will not examine results now, but I will refer to this and the previously mentioned study when explaining the core beliefs of Sanders and Trump. I wanted to explain the way that Oliver and Rahn examined their variables so that a comprehension of their variables and methods could be established before the rest of my discussion.

To examine the roots of Populism and the attractiveness of its message, I will make note here of the prevalence of Populist language overall but will focus in specifically on Sanders and Trump as campaigners. For this focus, I will examine general public opinion data and will compare the nation's feelings at large to the beliefs of the supporters of each of these two candidates. I use a variety of polling tools for this, including but not limited to: Pew Research Center, Gallup, Public Religion Research Institute, American National Election Studies, and Oliver and Rahn's study. I will begin by defining each candidate's message and style of Populism and will employ data throughout.

In a lot of popular analysis being produced during the 2016 campaign season, Trump's success was attributed to his 'personality' while Sanders' was tied to his 'authenticity'. Judis argues, however, that

What's missing from these explanations is the way Trump's and Sanders's political messages have resonated with large parts of the electorate. From the right and left, respectively, Trump and Sanders were taking aim at the neoliberal consensus, to which many voters, without naming or identifying it as such, have become hostile, particularly in the wake of the Great Recession. Trump and Sanders were continuing what Perot and Buchanan had started, but with a success that suggested the political consensus had become increasingly vulnerable. (Judis 64)

The data suggests that that political consensus was legitimately threatened in 2016. Quoting Vanderbilt Political Scientist Larry Bartels, Eric Levitz, writing for the New York Magazine, highlights some key findings from Bartels' study of the 2016 electorate that highlight how that political consensus has shifted. In contrast to a Neoliberal agenda focused on deregulation and unconcerned with impacts on the environment, a majority of Democrats *and* Republicans “endorse government efforts to regulate pollution, provide a decent standard of living for people unable to work, and ensure access to good health care” (Levitz 2018). Additionally, voters from both parties agree on a wide range of economic issues including increased government spending on healthcare, the preservation of the ACA's Medicaid expansion, a guarantee of affordable healthcare for people with pre-existing conditions, subsidized tuition for public colleges and universities, the provision of a “public option” for the internet, and the maintenance of taxation levels on corporations and the wealthy “*at least as high as they were before the Trump tax cuts passed*” (Levitz 2018). These are sprawling issues that are inconsistent with the Neoliberal agenda. Any one of these positions, then, expresses at least some anti-Neoliberal sentiment – the kind of attitude that Judis, Harvey, and Barrett believe to be ripe for Populist exploitation. To try to understand whether they were right, I examine Sanders' and Trump's rhetoric and the demographics and beliefs of their supporters. I rely heavily on polling data from sources like ANES, Pew Research Center, and Gallup to examine the beliefs of the supporters of each candidate.

Before moving on, it should be pointed out that Political Science research has shown that voters conform readily to the views of the party elites that they follow (Bullock 2011). This suggests that polling data may not tell the whole story, as it is not immediately obvious whether the data represents the real views and concerns of the voters or the concerns of the elites that they have latched on to. I take a few steps here to determine the legitimacy of the polling data I use.

First, John Bullock's study "Elite Influence on Public Opinion in an Informed Electorate" shows that, while the concern that voters simply adopt the views of party elites is valid, it should be tempered with his findings that voters "rarely possess even a modicum of information about policies; but when they do, their attitudes seem to be affected at least as much by that information as by cues from party elites" (Bullock 2011). That first finding indicates that being informed plays a huge role in the independence of voters' issue orientation. It means that, when voters are more educated about an issue, their opinions are more likely to be shaped by the information they have. Thus, it is plausible to assume that greater education overall might lead to greater independence in voting, indicating that polling data related to more educated voters may be more accurate.

The second way that I will account for the legitimacy of this polling data is by isolating the demographics of the voters of each candidate and searching for a connection between those demographics and the kinds of beliefs that would lead one to be attracted to anti-Capitalist and anti-Globalist Populism respectively. To do this, I break down the demographics of each candidates' support, look for defining factors or traits among them, and then look for evidence that that group of voters may be predisposed to throw their support behind the kind of Populism that each candidate offered. I turn first to an analysis of Bernie Sanders.

### *Sanders and Economic Populism*

If there's one thing Bernie Sanders is known for, it's his famous refrain that "the wealthiest 1/10 of 1% own as much wealth as the bottom 90%" ("Bernie Sanders for President"). If there's another, it's his consistency on that issue over decades of political activism. It is this kind of Economic Populism that sets Bernie out from the start. Sanders' message is clear and recognizable. His refrains are simplistic and consistent and offer an unambiguous criticism of the economic order. In their study, Oliver and Rahn found that roughly 99% of Sanders' language in 2016 fell

under the purview of “Economic Populism” (Oliver and Rahn 193). Sanders has been in Congress for several decades now, and his message has maintained. He has always been a clear and outspoken voice against income inequality, and in recent years, he has turned his focus to explicit criticisms of Neoliberalism and the status quo.

For this reason, I consider Sanders’ rhetoric and campaign messaging to be an anti-Capitalist brand of Economic Populism. This brand of Populism encapsulates rhetoric attacking the established wealthy class and economic order and speaking out against what he perceives to be the consequences of Capitalism. It casts the elite as the wealthy billionaires and the politicians that protect them and challenges that they have rigged the system against honest, hardworking Americans. This definition is important as I work to understand whether his base was especially primed for this kind of Populist messaging and whether it was this aspect of his candidacy that was most appealing and desirable for his supporters. To understand why I view his issues this way, I will briefly examine his history and rhetoric.

Take first, for example, Sanders’ Senate floor speech on September 18, 2008. Nowhere is his criticism of Neoliberalism more obvious. In his opening statements, he outlines his belief that the then-current economic crisis was directly the fault of Neoliberal practices. He sees the crisis as being “primarily because of one reason”: government policy and ideology has been “dominated by an extreme right-wing position that tells us... that government is bad and government has got to get out of the way so that we can allow large multinational corporations and the wealthiest people in this country to... create prosperity for all Americans”. Sanders spends the rest of his speech decrying tax breaks on the wealthy and corporations; decrying the bailouts of companies like AIG, whose failure he views as “closely tied to the same extremist ideology that has been pushing us toward economic disaster”; criticizing the policy of “unfettered free trade” that doesn’t

focus on American manufacturing and “throws American workers out on the street”; blaming the financial collapse on deregulation, saying that the government couldn’t check the policies of corporations because it had no idea what was going on; pushing for re-regulation in all industries; and reminding his colleagues of the declining middle class and falling real wages (Bernie Sanders, Senate Floor Speech 9/18/2008).

That kind of rhetoric was a mainstay of Sanders’ 2016 campaign as well, and his consistency throughout the years makes him an obvious choice for examination. I find Sanders’ message of interest for two reasons: 1) his consistency lends a degree of credibility and authenticity to his particular brand of Populism, characteristics that are not often ascribed to the rather cynical practice of Populism and 2) the fact that he has been espousing the same rhetoric for decades but only in 2016 chose to make a run for president (and in doing so, became a national phenomenon) suggests that 2016 is worth examining as a unique outlier for its degree of Populism. To understand him and the context of the 2016 election, then, let’s begin examining his issues.

John B. Judis, in *The Populist Explosion*, makes note of the reality that, despite a long political career, Sanders has always made a habit out of addressing yawning economic inequality. Judis contends that “In the House and Senate, [Sanders] stood firm against the party’s embrace of neoliberalism. He opposed NAFTA and the agreements with China, tax cuts on business, budgets that reduced social spending, and financial deregulation” (Judis 80). In December 2010, Sanders filibustered the budget and tax agreement that would prolong tax cuts for the wealthy (Judis 80). In 2016, Sanders thought of income inequality as a welcome campaign issue. Speaking on the topic, Sanders remarked “How do we address these issues in a way that takes on the billionaire class. Where they have significant control over the media, where they by and large determine the legislation that goes on in Congress, and as a result of *Citizens United* are prepared to buy the

United States Congress” (Judis 81). It is clear that Sanders understands himself as an anti-Capitalist – if not explicitly anti-Neoliberal – figure. His focus on economic issues that address the perceived representation gap also provides a clue as to how he chooses to frame the issue as because of these Capitalist forces. Sanders’ campaign also focused on a number of other issues that were either explicitly anti-Capitalist or offered alternatives to the Neoliberal order, including a single-payer healthcare system, free tuition for public colleges and universities financed by a “transaction tax on Wall Street speculation, and the reinstatement of the Glass-Steagall Act “separating commercial and investment banking” (Judis 81-82; “Bernie Sanders for President 2016”).

There can surely be no argument that Sanders offered a strong anti-Neoliberal policy platform, but the presence of such a platform would be meaningless without indications of public support. To understand this dimension, then, I turn to some public opinion data pulled from both Judis’ text and Oliver and Rahn’s study.

Judis argues that “Sanders's support, like Trump's, showed how much the Great Recession had radicalized significant parts of the electorate” (Judis 83). This analysis highlights the synthesis of Neoliberalism to Populism by directly connecting a ‘crisis’ – the Great Recession – to a Populist backlash. For his analysis of both Trump and Sanders’ supporters and empirical backing for his claims, Judis turns to two major polls: An American National Election Studies (ANES) poll in January 2016 and a Pew Research Center poll in March of the same year. In the Pew poll, Judis discovered that an astonishing 91% of Sanders’ voters thought the U.S. system unjustly favors the powerful, 82% thought that corporations make too much profit, and 57% thought that hard work was no guarantee of success (Judis 84). From the ANES poll, Judis found that 90.2% of Sanders’ voters thought that differences in income between the rich and the poor were larger than they were

20 years ago<sup>17</sup>, and 63.3% thought that there was little or no opportunity for the average person to get ahead in America (Judis 84). These statistics highlight extreme pessimism about economic futures for individuals and the nation, a reality that explains both Sanders' heavy reliance on Economic Populism and just why it was so attractive to his supporters.

Judis has his own explanation of where Sanders' voting base came from:

They are, in effect, the descendants of the McGovern generation who began gravitating to the Democratic party over post-material social and environmental concerns and over moral outrage at the Vietnam War and later the American invasion of Iraq and more recently, in the wake of the Great Recession, what they saw as the irresponsibility of Wall Street and the billionaire class. (Judis 84)

Judis indicates his belief that young voters were concerned about the opportunities that might await them in the wake of the crash (Judis 84-85). A large percentage of younger voters were also struggling with student loan debt that they weren't sure they were going to be able to pay off. Their economic anxieties reflected real trends. "According to the Economic Policy Institute, the real inflation-adjusted wages of young college graduates were 2.5 percent lower in 2015 than they were in 2000. At the same time, student debts ... skyrocketed, rising by 84 percent from 2008 to 2014" (Judis 85).

Oliver and Rahn's study found some similar conclusions, but also highlighted other interesting realities outside the realm of economics. Their study on Populism among primary candidates indicates that Sanders' supporters score the highest for "political marginalization" but score the lowest in both "national affiliation" and "mistrust of experts" (Oliver and Rahn 200). In

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<sup>17</sup> A feeling that is, it should be pointed out, supported by the data.

other words, in an election year where Nativism and anxieties about immigration became mainstays, Sanders' supporters showed a surprising adherence to chiefly economic and political concerns, choosing to focus on political representation and rampant inequality rather than race relations. This is consistent with the partisan divide on immigration outlined earlier in the "Key Issues and Variables" section of this paper and suggests that different portions of the electorate may have been primed for different styles of Populist messages.

The important question is still whether these findings are legitimate representations of the beliefs of Sanders' supporters. In order to test this, I look at the demographic breakdown of his support. Writing for Vox.com in 2016, Jeff Stein points out that, given Sanders' strong support in rural areas, there was a persistent myth that Sanders' main line of support came from the White working class. Looking further into the demographics, though, shows that the one standout and defining characteristic of Bernie Sanders' supporters was their youth<sup>18</sup> (Stein 2016). Stein points out that young voters tend to be poorer, so support from them can look like support from the working class.

If youth is the defining factor among Sanders' supporters, then it is the place to look for an electorate primed for anti-Capitalist rhetoric. An obvious place to start this analysis would be an examination of support for/ opposition to Capitalism amongst the youth compared to the same figure for Socialism. Two separate surveys on the issue bear fruit. First, Frank Newport, writing for Gallup in 2018, shows that, over the last several years, Democrats overall have grown to be more positive about Socialism than Capitalism. Additionally, in 2016, 57% of *all* (an important note, as this includes not just Democratic voters) those aged 18-29 viewed Capitalism favorably,

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<sup>18</sup> Defined as 18-29 year old voters.

a figure that had declined from 68% in 2010 (Newport 2018). 55% of this group viewed Socialism favorably, the highest of any age group. A 2016 YouGov, cited in Judis' text, had the same findings. Those aged 18-29 had a favorable view of Socialism by 43% to 26% and Democrats overall favored it 42% to 34% (Judis 85). Given that Sanders' supporters' primary demographic identity was that of youth and that they were also mostly Democrats and liberals, it seems that his voters were especially primed for anti-Capitalist rhetoric. This provides support for Harvey and Judis' claims that Neoliberalism played a key role in catalyzing support for Economic Populism.

It is important to note that while Sanders provides a clear and obvious case of connecting anti-Neoliberal sentiment to Populism, he also failed to win his party's nomination. His message may have been well-received<sup>19</sup>, and there were certainly realistic complaints about the legitimacy of the process, but as popular and influential as he might have been, a case analysis of just his campaign and supporters would not do much to help explain the general trend of Populism in 2016 and the apparent potency of such Populist messages. Bernie Sanders' success as a candidate should be measured in the impact that is already being felt in the Democratic party, which has begun to turn against the Neoliberal orthodoxy on "finance, trade, and capital mobility" (Judis 87). This is an achievement worthy of note, and it is for this reason that I think it important to acknowledge the power of the pressure inherent in his anti-Neoliberal message. To understand the whole of Populism in 2016, though, it is important to get a broader picture. To do this, I turn to examining the ideology of Donald Trump and his supporters and similarly examine the polling data related to them. Doing so provides a second case of explicit American Populism that might help further dissect this narrative.

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<sup>19</sup> He did, after all, break fundraising records, raking in more than 2.3 million individual donations on the back of his promises to deny any money from corporate influences (The Atlantic: "Bernie Sanders's Big Money").

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*Making America Great Again: Populism, Nativism, and Racial Anxieties*

To Oliver and Rahn, Donald Trump is a unique phenomenon among the 2016 field of candidates. Though almost every other candidate readily employed Populist-styled messaging, Trump stands out as the “Populist par excellence”. In their study, they found that “content analysis of campaign speeches shows that Trump, more so than any other candidate, employs a rhetoric that is distinctive in its simplicity, anti-elitism, and collectivism. Original survey data show that Trump's supporters are distinctive in their unique combination of anti-expertise, anti-elitism, and pronationalist sentiments” (Oliver and Rahn 189). Additionally, they found that Trump employed “Political Populism” (targeting language toward the system, special interests, etc.) the most of any candidate in the primaries (Oliver and Rahn 193).

Trump’s style of Populism is nicely summed up in a quote from him for the Wall Street Journal on April 14, 2016: “The only antidote to decades of ruinous rule by a small handful of elites is a bold infusion of popular will. On every major issue affecting this country, the people are right and the governing elite are wrong. The elites are wrong on taxes, on the size of government, on trade, on immigration, on foreign policy” (Oliver and Rahn 189). Trump had no qualms about his identification as a Populist; in fact, he rather leaned into the label. Populism is amorphous, though, and merely labeling him a Populist is not useful without looking at what his policy principles were.

Though Trump the President has implemented policies that have often included explicitly Neoliberal actions without much divergence from the course set by his predecessors (like tax cuts for the rich, the expansion of private prisons, further privatization and deregulation, and, as Reagan did before him, appointments of officials – like Scott Pruitt and the EPA – to head offices that they oppose), Trump the Campaigner approached the electorate with a Populist message riddled with

anti-Neoliberal criticisms (Barrett 168-70). On the campaign trail, Trump offered a platform that truly diverged from traditional Republicanism. His views on the issues tended to shift from left to right, as exemplified in his refusal to adopt an anti-abortion stance to his platform and his calls for massively increased infrastructure spending. Additionally, he defended Social Security and Medicare, at times even championing universal healthcare (Judis 65). The core issues that he campaigned on all had a Nationalistic bent to them, though. Throughout his campaign, his views on national defense included the position that the U.S. should withdraw from NATO, a shockingly isolationist declaration that was at home among his other policy positions (Judis 66-67). On the subject of trade, he opposed NAFTA and the TPP and called for the imposition of tariffs on trading partners like China, for whom he also wanted a currency reevaluation (Judis 66-67). When it came to outsourcing and offshoring, he was as outspoken as Sanders: he proposed tariffs on outsourced goods, criticized companies like Amazon for outsourcing, called for a restoration of American manufacturing, complained about corporate tax inversions, and even made an appeal to Sanders' supporters to join him in criticizing the 'parasitic political system and its donors' (Judis 69). In these complaints about offshoring and outsourcing, Judis saw a Trump that was "taking aim at the skewed distribution of jobs and income that neoliberal economics had created over the prior decades" (Judis 69). Finally, it is the subject of immigration where Trump made himself known as a distinctly nativist Populist. Across the board, Trump emphasized an "America First" mentality which, at its core, was extremely hostile to immigrants, especially illegal ones. His calls to "build the wall" along the U.S.-Mexico border highlight the synthesis of that "America First" nationalistic rhetoric to his nativist and isolationist beliefs. For all these reasons, I consider him to be an anti-Globalist Populist with strong nationalistic tendencies.

In addition to this aspect of his campaign, the inherent contradiction of Trump's dual identity as a billionaire and a Populist stood out during the 2016 primary election season. As it always is, Trump's Entrepreneur Populism – a billionaire running against the established political class – was hard to square. In his ad "The Establishment", Trump wasted no time making the case for a billionaire Populist. In it, Trump proclaims that "The establishment, the media, the special interest, the lobbyists, the donors, they're all against me. I'm self-funding my campaign. I don't owe anybody anything. I only owe it to the American people to do a great job. They are really trying to stop me" (Judis 72). This was the admittedly smart workaround for the contradiction of a billionaire running against the elite: in a system where money is everything, a man with everything can't be bought. His strategy worked, and "his nastiness - seen as defying standards of political correctness - combined with his substantive appeals on trade, immigration, and runaway shops, tapped into a vein of support among Republicans and independents" (Judis 74). Just who were his supporters, though? Who comprised the "silent majority"?

Throughout his run, Trump's criticisms of Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism drove a wedge between the Republican coalition of the party's business interests and white working- and middle-class voters (Judis 74). In his criticisms, Judis claims, "He had become the voice of middle American radicalism and more broadly of the white Americans who felt left behind by globalization and the shift to a post-industrial economy" (Judis 74). Trump's appeals were intended for an audience primed to rebel against Neoliberal globalization. Looking at demographic and polling data among those who comprised the "silent majority" can give some insight into why he was so attractive to some and whether that attraction was related to anti-Globalist sentiments in the electorate that formed his base.

Again, citing the ANES and Pew polls utilized for examining Sanders' supporters, Judis works to understand Trump's voter base. In the ANES poll, Judis found that Trump supporters were proportionally older and less well educated than those of other candidates: 70.1% of Trump supporters were not college graduates and half of his voters made less than \$50,000 a year (Judis 75). In this segment of Trump's base, Judis saw the descendants of white working-class voters who had fled the Democratic party in the 1960s after their embrace of the civil rights movement. Judis contends that "already alienated from Washington and the changes they had seen around them in 1972, they had become even more so in 2016, as the Great Recession seemed like the final blow to their economic prospects in an economy that disproportionately favored the upper middle class and very rich" (Judis 75). The ANES poll, for example, showed that 48% of Trump's voters thought that economic conditions were poor, making them the most pessimistic set of voters in the 2016 election (Judis 76). 61%, according to the Pew poll, thought the U.S. economic system unfairly favored the powerful. As additional support for this idea, Judis offers an anecdotal account alleging that supporters at Trump's rallies "invariably" referenced his self-financing as a major factor in their support for him (Judis 76). On the subject of trade, the Pew report showed that 67% of Trump supporters thought of free trade agreements as bad for the U.S. (Judis 76). When it came to the subject of benefits, 73% opposed any reduction in Social Security while a majority opposed benefits like Obamacare that they viewed as benefitting the poor, a position that mirrored that of the Tea Party (Judis 77). Judis contends that Trump's message fit the bill of "middle American Populism", a kind of ideology that is skeptical of both the powers above and below (Judis 76). Such economic pessimism mirrors some of the beliefs of Sanders' voters, but while economics was the main draw for Sanders' voters, the picture is more complicated for Trump voters.

The Oliver and Rahn study of Trump supporters, for example, found that they scored highest for “mistrust of elites” and “national affiliation” and second highest (among the field of primary candidates) for “political marginalization” (Oliver and Rahn 199). Additionally, Trump voters were found to feel the most socially alienated and harbor the strongest nativist sentiments. Though the data does indicate serious pessimism about their financial futures, linking their beliefs somewhat to the Tea Party, the most significant and important finding was that Trump supporters feared immigrants the most of any base of support, a reality that highlights Oliver and Rahn’s findings about nativism amongst Trump supporters (Oliver and Rahn 201). Returning to Judis’ figures, the ANES study showed that 66.4% opposed birthright citizenship for immigrants born in the U.S. (Judis 76). The Pew study also showed that some 69% thought of immigrants as a burden on the country (Judis 76). The 2015 PRRI report provides additional insight into the identity of Trump supporters. In their report, some 69% of Trump supporters saw immigration as personally important, compared with only 50% of the GOP overall (Cooper et al. 2015). 80% of Trump supporters thought of immigrants as a burden because they take American jobs, housing, and healthcare. 73% said that they are bothered when they come into contact with immigrants that speak little or no English. The PRRI report compares these figures to Republican party voters overall, who still responded in the majority to these questions (56% and 58% respectively) but were not nearly as convinced of the negatives of immigrants (Cooper et al. 2015).

While these statistics are illuminating, it is again important to temper them with the understanding that they might be more indicative of the candidate that these voters support than the actual views of those voters. In order to test the legitimacy of the data, then, I employ the same tactic used for examining support for Bernie Sanders. Demographic data from Pew Research Center is again the method employed. In this case, the data can be relied upon to be more definitive,

as this 2018 study was able to cross-reference validated voters to ensure that reports were accurate based on how voters actually ended up casting their ballots.

There are several interesting findings from this study. First, 30% of validated voters in 2016 were whites with a four-year college degree education or greater (“An Examination” 2018). Of that set, 55% went for Clinton and 38% voted Trump. 44% of validated voters were whites who had not completed college, a set of voters that Trump won 64% to Clinton’s 28%. These statistics confirm Judis’ assertion that Trump’s voters were proportionally whiter and less educated. There are two important takeaways from this. First, lower levels of education, as Bullock’s 2011 study showed, tend to mean that voters define their views more by the party elite that they follow than by any other heuristic. This might suggest that this defining characteristic of Trump’s voter demographics doesn’t necessarily lend any credence to the idea that the aforementioned polling data is especially trustworthy and legitimate. While this does mean that a different measure needs to be explored to be certain of the legitimacy of the polling data, there is one more important point to make about this set of data. A 2003 study published in the journal *Political Psychology* entitled “The Effect of Education on Nationalism and Ethnic Exclusionism: An International Comparison” from authors Marcel Coenders and Peer Scheepers highlights the reality that uneducated voters tend to rank higher in feelings of nationalism, suggesting that this demographic characteristic might actually correlate to the kind of nationalistic sentiment driving support for an anti-Globalist Populist. To be sure, though, I need to examine more demographic data and see whether there is a more certain connection.

The next best place to look in the demographic data is in the age breakdown. In contrast to Sanders, Trump’s voters appear proportionally older. In 2016, 13% of validated voters were younger than 30, and Clinton won this demographic 58% to 28% (“An Examination” 2018). Of

voters 50-64, Trump won 51% to 45%. From voters 65 and older, Trump won 53% to 44%. There does appear to be a trend of higher support for Trump among older voters, so it seems that age is a good defining characteristic to examine to determine the legitimacy of the polling data. So, is there any research that suggests that older voters might be primed for anti-Globalist Populist messaging? In fact, it looks as though there may be.

A 2016 article titled “Aging, Trade, and Migration”, from Chisik et al. suggests that older voters tend to be more susceptible to nationalistic views. Additionally, they find that this kind of nationalism leads to isolationist trade policy and can reinforce the views of those anti-Globalists. Effectively, they find a tangible link between aging and nationalism and relate that to anti-Globalist sentiment. This is enough to show that age is an appropriate demographic factor to determine whether the polling data provided represents the legitimate views of the voters or not. Given the findings of Chisik et al.’s study, it appears as though the hypothesis is supported. Trump voters were in fact especially primed for anti-Globalist Populist messaging, lending support to the assertions of Judis, Harvey, and Barrett.

The essence of all these findings is that Trump’s voters responded to a myriad of anti-Neoliberal issues, usually from a rather self-centered perspective. Their isolationist and nativist views, as well as their anti-immigrant views, coincide with upward trends in nativism and isolationism previously discussed in the “Global Capitalism and Nativism” sub-section of “Key Issues and Variables”. In this regard, Trump’s message and his supporters’ beliefs seem to follow the trend of anti-Neoliberal sentiment as outlined. Trump’s obvious Populism then appears inextricably linked to his anti-Neoliberal rhetoric, at least when examining his campaign for the office of the President of the United States.

## Neoliberalism and America into the Future

Writing in 2005, before the rise of the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street Populist movements, Harvey predicted a growing anti-Neoliberal backlash on the horizon:

... It is not clear either that the mass of the working people in the US, who have over this last generation often willingly voted against their own material interests for reasons of cultural nationalism, religion, and moral values, will forever stay locked into such a politics by the machinations of Republicans and Democrats alike. Given the volatility, there is no reason to rule out the resurgence of *popular social democratic or even populist* anti-neoliberal politics within the US in future years. (Harvey 199) [Emphasis mine.]

It is rather impressive the degree to which Harvey's evaluation came true. Harvey, Barrett, and Judis would have argued that Populist backlash, as seen in 2016, would mean the death knell of Neoliberalism, an ideology that, in their telling, may have always been inevitably short-lived. Harvey points out, for example, several glaring and exploitable contradictions within the Neoliberal agenda. For one, Harvey argues, the widening gap between the rhetoric of Neoliberals ("for the benefit of all") and the realization of the agenda ("the benefit of a small ruling class") has become, through the rise of such consequences as massive wealth and income inequality, "all too visible" (Harvey 203). Additionally, "the idea that the market is about competition and fairness is increasingly negated by the fact of the extraordinary monopolization, centralization, and internationalization of corporate and financial power" (Harvey 203). In Harvey's view, "The more neoliberalism is recognized as a failed utopian rhetoric masking a successful project for the restoration of ruling-class power, the more the basis is laid for a resurgence of mass movements voicing egalitarian political demands and seeking economic justice, fair trade, and greater economic security" (Harvey 203-204). If Harvey is to be believed, then the Populism of 2016 may have been just the beginning of the end.

Populism is, as a rhetorical framework, ever-present as an undercurrent in the American psyche. It is unrealistic to expect it to simply go away. That reality, then, means that we should take time to understand what it means for our society. Writing for the Guardian in 2018, James Miller makes the case in “Could Populism Actually be Good for Democracy?” that it is, in actuality, a useful check on Democracy. In his argumentation, Populist movements, designed to reclaim wealth and political power in modern democracies, “are essential to the vitality, and viability, of modern democracy - even as (and precisely because) they challenge the status quo, destructive though that challenge may be” (Miller 2018). The premise for his argument is that, for all its trouble, Populism is a useful tool precisely because of the urgency that it forces upon us. Populism points us in the direction of our failures, holds us down, and forces us to look.

I take some issue with this exact line of argumentation. As a narrative framework, Populism cannot necessarily be understood as a “check”; Populism is opportunistic and frequently exclusive. That said, there is some value in his idea. As exclusive as the narrative often is, Populists do claim to speak for the people. When they enjoy significant success, as Donald Trump did, it is a good indication that the people might have some concerns that they want addressed. So, when Populists come along, disingenuous, opportunistic claims and all, and tell us to look, regardless of where they are pointing, we must be equipped to examine the crisis that allowed them that platform in the first place. And, despite the character of many who cynically seize the helm of Populism in often vain attempts to achieve power, the people on the ground who make up the base of support for Populists have genuine concerns that they want answered. Perhaps it is better, then, to consider the rise of Populists as “focusing events” rather than explicit check on democracy. In this telling, Populists can still be understood to be a marginal and often dangerous entity but can still be treated as something that needs to be attended to.

Though not all Populist movements can be cast in such a positive light, Barrett concludes his book on a similar, more hopeful sentiment: “The people who continue to struggle for a more humane world, despite their chances and the risk of violence, may seem naïve, but they continue fighting because they know what they will get otherwise - a continuation of the unacceptable. They fight. They defy. They disrupt. They demand the impossible, and they seek the unattainable. And they do so, like those before them, to avoid the unimaginable” (Barrett 163). It is naïve to believe that Populist support will dissipate after defeat, leaving the world to slide back comfortably into its state of normalcy. If there’s one thing that Barrett’s book outlines, it is the tenacity of righteous activists and the will of those who believe in a cause.

The results of this paper suggest that Harvey, Barrett, and Judis are right in acknowledging Neoliberalism as a driving force behind these Populist messages. Polling data, as related to the key issues and variables outlined throughout this paper, suggests that many are unwilling to maintain the status quo. When examining the issues of income inequality and global Neoliberalization, the trends are clear: voters feel underrepresented and disproportionately bear the consequences of the decisions of economic and political elites. The results of this paper suggest that one crisis that Populists have been pointing to, as Barrett and Judis have argued, has been Neoliberalism. In the Populists’ opportunism, they betray an honest depiction of the hardships that average Americans face, and bring light to issues that have long been ignored.

Other than this take away, there are a few key points that need to be made. First, this paper does not comprehensively examine the issues presented by Neoliberalism. For example, the passage of Obamacare was briefly touched on, but an examination of the nuance of the way in which it forced consumers into the hands of private insurers was foregone in favor of other issues. I also neglected to examine the effects of Neoliberalism on the environment (through the

deregulation of corporations and the establishment of unregulated free trade zones where such externalities are all but ignored) and the extremely strong wave of protests that arose in response to it, as outlined extensively throughout Dawson Barrett's book. Additionally, as mentioned, I decided against a discussion of the effects of the Great Recession and rise of corporate lobbying for clarity and brevity, but these issues are surely worth examining in the narrative of the rise of Populism. There are also some other factors that future research should take into account when examining popular opinion. I think, for instance, that Oliver and Rahn's assertion that increasing media coverage of income inequality led to stronger feelings about it in opinion polling suggests that the role of the media and the coverage of certain issues should be studied as it relates to Populism. Perhaps such a Populist backlash as the massive outpouring of support for Sanders' campaign, which was run primarily on the issue of inequality, could have come sooner if the issue had been brought to national prominence sooner (the upticks in concern over the issue that correlated with the rise of OWS, as outlined earlier in the paper from Kenworthy and Owens, also indicates that movements can fill this role and bring issues to prominence). Future research should also concern itself with the effect of the global migrant crisis, the advent of fake news, Russian interference in elections around the world, and growing racial tensions around the world on the rise of Populism. As I discussed in my introduction, I think that fake news may be a marginal variable, but as more information is available, it may be an interesting confounding variable to throw into the mix in order to see if Populists may have had the same appeal without it.

This paper does not comprehensively examine all the factors in the success of Populists in 2016. While I treat Neoliberalism as an important piece of the puzzle, it is just *a* piece of the puzzle. Why was 2016 the year that tensions spilled over into Populist pushback? What was

different about 2016 that allowed a nativist Populist like Trump to seize the presidency? These questions should direct further research on the subject.

I believe that the evidence in this paper, though, is sufficient to show that the hypothesis that Neoliberalism was a crisis that Populists were responding to does not fail when held up to empirical testing. Though I think there are other variables worth consideration, I think a good number of them may have relationships with Neoliberalism anyway. For example, an examination of the media would surely have to come up against such questions as why it covers what it does. While not entirely the answer, the media, especially in the U.S., is run as a business, with vested interests in profit. In some cases, stakeholders get significant voice in what the organization gets to portray. For example, in 2016, the U.S. saw the largest prison strike in history (Speri 2016). Despite the scope of the protest, few major news sources carried the story. Looking more closely, organizations like ABC and NBC had parent companies with ties to the Corrections Corporation of America – the largest for-profit prison corporation in America – and similar groups who had a vested interest in a certain silence on the issue. An examination of the role of the media in the rise of Populism would surely have to reconcile with the corporate side of the media, a task which would mean grappling with the relationship between profit and coverage.

Populism is an ugly, unkind thing that transforms and bastardizes the concerns of citizens, but it is a useful tool. So long as the tradition continues, we should heed its warnings and take the time for the introspection necessary to understand when we have gone wrong. The premise of the hypothesis in this paper is that that crisis that Populists were pointing to was the ideology of Neoliberalism. With that understanding, we should take the time to have a healthy conversation about reform. Now is the time to figure out what our future will look like. If the results of the last election cycle are any indication, we may want to consider a new path forward.

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