Trumpocracy: The Rise of Populism in Europe and America

Michael F. Kickham III

University of Missouri-St. Louis, mfkbqb@mail.umsl.edu

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Trumpocracy: The Rise of Populism in Europe and America

Michael F. Kickham III
B.A Political Science and History, University of Arizona, 2014

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Advisory Committee
J. Martin Rochester, Ph.D.
Chairperson

David C. Kimball, Ph.D.

Kenneth Thomas, Ph.D.

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to examine the root cause of the populist backlash that has been so prominent in recent western democracies. Populist backlashes have occurred with frequency over time, however since the turn of the 21st Century, they have occurred with increased frequency and effectiveness. This is largely due to a disconnect between political and media elites and the general public. I propose two models; the “fragment theory” and the “feedback loop” theory to help explain the increased effectiveness of populist movements. The “fragment theory” is the idea that fringe political parties are able to challenge mainstream parties and gain significant support by appealing to the public on major issues that are poorly addressed by mainstream parties. The “feedback loop” theory is the idea that fringe candidates and parties have a mutual, symbiotic relationship in which the media relies on candidates for extreme rhetoric and advertisement revenue while the extremist candidate or party relies on the media for legitimacy. While this paper is not a comprehensive overview of nationalism or populism in every country, it focuses primarily on populism in the United States, Britain, and France. Finally, this paper examines the future of populism and whether young people will continue the recent trend of populist success.
On June 23rd, 2016, the voters of Britain elected to leave the European Union in a historic and shocking referendum. It was a referendum that was deemed nearly impossible and unlikely by virtually every political pundit. A large number of economists and politicians had advised against leaving the European Union. The shocking result represented a blind spot in both the political elite and polling researchers. How did a referendum that was behind as much as ten points in the polling just a month out, result in such a decisive victory for the Leave campaign? The Brexit vote and the speculation prior to the referendum indicates a disconnect between the media, political elite, and the masses. However, Brexit would not be the final or even the most shocking populist victory of 2016. On November 8th, 2016, Americans elected Donald Trump which marked the stunning defeat of Hillary Clinton, a political insider and the candidate who was projected to defeat Trump in a landslide victory. Both Brexit and Trump are clear indications of citizens feeling disdain for their current political systems and looking for alternatives or a chance for retribution toward the political institutions and candidates which they felt had abandoned them. This was largely the resultant of candidates and systems being fairly unresponsive to public concerns. Indeed, one of the most prominent issues facing both Britain and the United States revolved around immigration. Both the Republican Party and Democratic Party as well as the mainstream British parties failed to address these concerns for many voters, with but two exceptions, Donald Trump and The United Kingdom Independence Party. This failure was in addition to Congress setting low levels of approval ratings and the European Parliament also facing a number of
problems with public perception and a lingering economic recession. The election of Donald Trump and the Brexit decision are largely the resultant of political elites failing to properly frame the argument and a failure to propose effective legislation to address the concerns of European and American citizens.

This paper proposes two critical theories to understand why populist candidates arise and what makes them so successful. The first theory is called the “fragment theory”. The fragment theory effectively explains why populist candidates in Europe, and to a lesser extent America, are able to shift from fringe political candidates or movements to mainstream challengers. Eurosceptic parties often take a position on either one or a few relevant political issues concerning the public. These are issues that are generally poorly addressed by larger, mainstream political parties, yet still fundamental issues within the voter-base. Mainstream political parties attempt to avoid large and difficult issues such as immigration and social welfare, which tend to be more divisive issues, as to not alienate large portions of the voters. This in turn, leads to a platform void in which populist movements and Eurosceptic movements have attempted to fill. While these issues may begin as fringe and minute problems, because parties are reluctant to address it and policy is difficult to craft around it, they manifest into larger and eventually significant problems. With regards to issues such as immigration, the free movement of peoples began in Europe with the founding of the European Community in the 1950’s and immigration across the Mexican border has been a political issue in America since the 1980’s. These issues have not been addressed properly by any form of policy and have
thus compounded. As a result, populist campaigns have focused on a single issue, like immigration, and then slowly expanded their base from that issue as their party has grown in size. This is particularly notable in Europe, in which many countries have a plurality of parties rather than a duality; thus, parties are far less diverse in ideology and it is easier for constituents to shift political allegiance without a notable shift in political platform.

The second theory I propose is the ‘feedback loop’ theory. The feedback loop theory is the idea that the media and extreme candidates have a mutual interest and symbiotic relationship. Media outlets cover extreme parties or candidates for the purposes of garnering television ratings, headline clicks, or newspaper sales. The candidate also relies on the media for press coverage and legitimacy. The fact that major news corporations addressed Donald Trump as “presidential hopeful” or “2016 Republican candidate” only served to solidify Donald Trump as a serious threat to take the White House. For the media, Donald Trump was the perfect candidate, a repeatable soundboard to be aired over and over. He was a candidate that seemingly presented new material every week and as a result, landed as a major political headline every week. For the purposes of this theory, I do not include forms of social media as part of the feedback loop theory. While Donald Trump used his Twitter account extensively in the run up to his election, social media platforms are largely subscriber based, meaning users must opt into following Trump’s messages to receive them. Additionally, while Twitter does
benefit from a large user base, it does not receive the same benefits for viewership or clicks. Additionally, Twitter does not give Donald Trump any further legitimacy as a presidential candidate, only a platform for his message.

These two theories in large part explain why populist candidates or parties are able to shift from fringe movements to mainstream challengers. However, each theory’s applicability depends on the country. It is certainly true that the fragment theory fails to explain why America is still a two-party system, despite problems with both parties. However, competitors such as the Libertarian or the Constitution Party may indicate that fragment theory works well in localized elections. It may be an unrelated phenomenon as it seems most local candidates have difficulty translating their message into significant voter presence, but requires additional research beyond the scope of this paper. On the contrary, while the “feedback loop” theory may apply to American politics, it is not necessarily applicable to Europe in the same way. One of the most notable differences between American and European politics seems to be the role of the 24-hour news cycle. Many European countries have a 24-hour news channel, but they are less influential and less polarized than American cable news networks. In the case of Britain, the BBC is a state-run broadcast and far less subjected to the whims of the advertising world than a cable-based news network might be. Additionally, given the duality of the American political system and the current stark ideological contrast between the parties, it seems far
more likely that commercial news networks attempt to capitalize on those ideological demographics.

**Populism: An Explanation and Historical Overview**

Populism, a word that has been abuzz since the election of Donald Trump, is aptly described as a grassroots movement dedicated to restoring power to the common people. There is some debate whether populism is rooted in a set of principles or a style of campaign or movement. For the purposes of this paper, it is both. Populism is indisputably linked to the concerns of common people, but after examination of Eurosceptic parties and the 2016 presidential election, it is also deeply rooted in the style of campaign. Populist candidates or movements often brand themselves as “anti-establishment” and the origins of populist movements usually focus around a single issue before expanding to broader policy issues. Often, they are a reaction to a relatively inattentive Parliament or Congress. Political questions that are large, divisive, and often do not have easy solutions are prime candidates for grassroots support to swell around. This section of the paper will focus around the history of populism and nationalism in the United States. While Europe has had a long, extensive history with nationalism, particularly in the early 20th Century, this paper is not comprehensive enough to delve into the wide history of nationalism across every country in Europe. Rather, this section
will be an overview of the goals of populism and nationalism and what roles they have historically played in elections.

Populism has been an integral part of American history. This is a country founded upon populist ideas and an anti-establishment movement during the American Revolution. Harry Watson, a historian at the Smithsonian Museum, said, “Early populist notions appeared in the rhetoric of 19th-century English radicals who warned of an eternal struggle between liberty, virtue, and the common good against corrupt and tyrannical courtiers. Their ideas spread and evolved in the American Revolution, as the ‘war for the home rule’ became a ‘war over who should rule home.’” (Watson, 2016) It is only natural that America has had a long and extensive history and the sentiments of the “self-made man” are still present today. The earliest roots of populism in the United States lie within the Tennessee valley and the beginning of Andrew Jackson’s presidential campaign. Andrew Jackson was a Southerner and widely hailed as a Washington outsider and a man of the common people. His 1828 presidential slogan was even “Andrew Jackson and the will of the people” and he was known as “Old Hickory” for his humble, rural roots. (Watson, 2016) Yet, it was not just Jackson’s background which made him America’s first populist president, it was also his conduct. He was notorious for inviting his rowdy constituent base to the White House for his inauguration and subsequently trashing it. One witness described it, “The Majesty of the People had disappeared… A rabble, a mob, of boys, negroes, women, children, scrambling fighting, romping… The whole White House had been inundated by the rabble mob”. As Watson puts it, “Mrs. Smith
probably exaggerated, and the melee stemmed more from poor planning than innate barbarism, but she perfectly captured the attitude of America’s ‘better sort’ to the mass of farmers, artisans, tradesman, and laborers who now had final authority in its government” (Watson, 2016). Andrew Jackson carried many of his constituent’s concerns with him to the White House; he feared the Federal Reserve and the banking industry providing advantages for political insiders. Yet most importantly, Jackson marked the first time a president had been elected from outside the political or intellectual elite. While he was renowned for his victory at the Battle of New Orleans, he was far from the class of political elites that had inhabited the role of the presidency previously.

Despite Andrew Jackson’s popularity amongst commoners, populism would have limited future impact in future presidential elections and in American politics until the late 19th century. This was in large part due to the emergence of the Whig Party and a series of unpopular policies from Jacksonian Democrats. Yet, a new populist wave would flourish nearly half a century later. In 1892, at the Industrial Conference in St. Louis, Missouri, the People’s Party was launched. In their manifesto they said, “We seek to restore the government of the Republic to the hands of ‘the plain people’ with whose class it originated.” Laura Grattan, in her book *Populism’s Power*, said, “The Populist movement began in the experimental spaces of the agrarian and labor movements of the 1870’s and 1880’s, as farmers and laborers invented alternatives to the everyday rituals of domination that had for decades marked their horizons of economic and political possibility.” (Grattan, 50) Populism garnered tremendous momentum in the late 19th
century and clashed with many other political interest groups that composed mainstream parties. The People’s Party and its constituents had many similarities with Socialist or Labor parties. So much, that these parties feared the success of the People’s Party. Yet, as Grattan notes, the People’s Party had one distinct difference that has been a hallmark of populism: a heavy nationalistic identity. She says, “At worst, we remember Populism as a nostalgic backlash against capitalist modernization, as notable for its racist, nativist, and patriarchal rhetoric as for its economic grievances” (Grattan, 51). However, this is a rather limited and poorly developed examination of populism. Certainly, there is a substantial element of nationalism within populist 18th century movements and today. However, the primary efforts of the People’s Party and other populist movements were rooted in combating a form of crony-capitalism and governmental overreach, which they saw as a breach of the purpose of the Republic. Accusations of racism are often grotesquely exaggerated. Early populist movements were egalitarian and relied heavily on black farmers and laborers. While they were nationalistic and perhaps even xenophobic, because many populists lived in the Midwest and South, the movement is incorrectly conflated as a movement motivated by racism. Many of these constituents were racist, however, to suggest that racism was a platform of many early populist movements is unfounded. John Lukacs in his book Democracy and Populism says, “The populists mostly came from the Midwest and South, they believed in reform arising from the lower classes” (Lukacs, 58). Areas of the country in which populist movements were
largely successful were areas in which slavery was an integral part of life and following the Civil War, Jim Crow became an integral part of life. This is precisely why I argue that racism is incorrectly attributed to populism. Yet, given that many populist movements are nativist in nature, it begs the question why did these movements arise in the Midwest and South? Populism is a movement largely grounded in a belief of the self-made man and ideas of self-governance. The idea of the self-made man was born on the frontier and it is only natural that populist, and even conservative ideas, were rooted in places where self-sufficiency was a requirement and the reaches of the government were limited.¹ Culturally, the Midwest and South still hold these populist roots.

John Lukacs notes this significant political shift towards populism for laborers in America. He attributes the shift to an ideological split in the Democratic party during the early 1900’s. He says, “The Democratic party – mostly, though not exclusively, because of its strength in the South – included and absorbed the Populists, whose political party, by and large disappeared.” (Lukacs, 58) He explains further, “At the same time, the Democratic Party began to appeal to the industrial working class as well as to most immigrants. By about 1910 (though not yet in the South), they had become, by and large, the more liberal party of the two. (Lukacs, 58) Lukacs notes the first shifting of the Democratic Party away from its populist roots and towards a more progressive leaning.

¹ In this context, I mean the conservative way of life, not necessarily the ideology. However, the ideology is increasingly becoming a defining characteristic of the South with the consistent election of Republican candidates in many public office seats.
The union of progressives and populists was merely one of convenience rather than one of necessity or ideological similarities. Not only had the Democratic party become the more liberal party, but they had become significantly more progressive as the result of changing demographics. These changes occurred largely on the coast, in larger cities, and at universities. “They were no longer the reform-minded Republicans of the upper classes. American intellectuals and what may be called the American Intelligentsia – a new phenomenon, a class marked not only by their social province but by their ideas and opinions were, with very few exceptions, proponents and partisans of political and social reforms – in one word progressives.” (Lukacs, 59) This marked a sudden shift by the Democratic party ideologically towards the left. This is evident with candidates such as Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt, who were far more progressive than many of their Southern Democratic counterparts. Increasingly, the Midwest and Southern populists became both a liability for the Democratic party and ideologically isolated.² Lukacs also notes, “However, these liberal intellectuals and professionals still believed in political and social reforms from above. They regarded themselves, surely mentally, as superior to ‘the people’ whom they wished to assist and reform.” (Lukacs, 59) In addition to ideological differences, this elitism divided the Democratic party heavily and once again manifested itself in the 2016 election. Distrust between intellectual elites and

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² It is worth noting that despite Woodrow Wilson being a more progressive candidate, he was notoriously racist and as a result would have still likely been accepted by Southern Democrats even if they did not agree with his policy proposals.
populists was instrumental in the widening gap within the Democratic party. The ability
to be both a populist and progressive, such as Henry Ford or Calvin Coolidge, virtually
evaporated by the 1920s.\footnote{Calvin Coolidge is perhaps the last ‘progressive’ Republican candidate as following his Presidency, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Democratic Party came to occupy progressivism.} According to Lukacs, “a few years later the divorce of populists and progressives was final… the remaining old progressives were internationalists, while the Populists were nationalists – indeed, American national socialists of a kind.” (Lukacs, 61)

One area in which John Lukacs does expand his discussion is the idea of “anti-intellectualism” within populism. This was an argument proposed by Richard Hofstadter in \textit{Anti-Intellectualism in American Life}. He critiqued populism as anti-intellectual and this is not entirely true. Lukacs does note that the initial splitting of the populists and progressives occurred in 1925 around the debate between creationism and evolution, but rather, this seems more indicative of a key populist figure, William Jennings Bryan, against that of science rather than the entire populist platform (Lukacs, 60). It is also worth noting, populism is not inherently anti-intellectual. Indeed, as Lukacs argues, populists do subscribe to intellectual thought and critique ideological opponents, much in the same way that progressives subscribed to their intellectuals. Both sides have a penchant for describing other intellectuals as “pseudo-intellectuals”. Thus, as Lukacs argues, Hofstadter’s argument is just as much an argument of pseudo-intelligentsia as he
accuses the populists of making. Hofstadter’s arguments highlight the penchant for intellectual superiority that Lukacs has described amongst early 20th Century progressives and intelligentsia. This is a trend that has continued amongst both populists and progressives into the 21st Century, with examples such as Donald Trump calling the media “fake news”. It seems more commonly “anti-intellectualism” has been a form of discrediting ideological opponents rather than a true penchant for ignoring intellectual truths.

Two of the most prominent modern populist movements in the United States occurred relatively recently and have had lasting effects on the political landscape. The Tea Party movement is perhaps the most prominent movement in the past several decades. The Tea Party movement represented a shift by strong conservative voters who were unhappy with Republican representation under the Obama administration. The movement was nothing short of a hostile take-over of the Republican Party by a group of hardline Conservatives distraught from weak Republican leadership. “Tea Partiers” felt that moderate Republicans were failing to represent their interests and caving to Democratic pressure. Several prominent Republican seats were openly challenged by Tea Party organizations which ultimately culminated with the defeat of Eric Cantor, then House Majority leader, and the resignation of former Speaker of the House, John Boehner. The defeat of two of the most prominent Republican figures was truly a remarkable turning point for the Tea Party. It was perhaps the first signal that the grassroots movement was a force to be reckoned within the Republican Party. In contrast,
the Occupy Wall Street movement is rooted much more in policy change rather than party change. The movement was heavily focused in consumer protection and concerned with corporate greed. While the Occupy movement may be more concerned policy change, it undoubtedly played a significant role in the 2016 Presidential election and was largely responsible for Bernie Sanders’ initial success. What is most noteworthy about both these movements was their ability to shift the debate. Laura Grattan described the movements as “competing populist responses to the crises of neoliberalism democracy in the twenty-first century.” (Grattan, 144) She notes that, while both the Tea Party and Occupy movement are politically at odds, they both ask the fundamental question of a populist movement; “whom or what has been harmed, and by whom.” (Grattan, 144)

However, Grattan incorrectly associates the Tea Party movement with an identarian backlash. She argues, “The Tea Party’s thrived because think tanks, elected officials, and a powerful right-wing echo chamber were able to contrive resonant assemblages to centralize rhetoric and identification. The Tea Party, who, in turn, constituted popular power to support neoliberal and reactionary policies. Specifically, the Tea Party’s resonance machine tapped into America’s regulated populist imaginary to update the familiar narrative brought to us by Chevrolet – one in which ‘real Americans’ must defend unlimited and individual freedom for a nation people defined as white, male, and Christian.” (Grattan, 141) As I have argued in this paper, the modern populist backlash is

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4 The crises of neoliberalism is generally considered the failure of governments to be responsive to public demand.
not an identitarian movement, but rather a political backlash. Grattan, along with many other scholars, seem to incorrectly conflate the two. For example, the Tea Party argument against Mexican immigration is entirely policy-driven. These “white, male, and Protestant” voters do not argue that there are ‘too many non-whites entering the country’, but rather, they argue that Mexican migrants are coming across the border using the American social welfare system, driving down wages, and taking jobs from Americans. Whether this is a correct assessment or not is irrelevant, these are economic and policy arguments, not ethno-nationalist arguments. The conflation between the two is also commonly levied against Eurosceptic groups and demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of the goals and motives of each populist group. Furthermore, Grattan’s argument seems to ignore the primary objective of the Tea Party movement, which was to elect more conservative Republicans to Congress.

The Occupy Wall Street movement was quite different to the Tea Party movement both in terms of scope and objective. Laura Grattan argues it was both a populist backlash but also an ideological response to the Tea Party. She says, “Instead, some scholars called for a left populism to counter the Tea Party. Behind this exhortation was the belief the Left needed its own oppositional rhetoric – one that could arouse widespread collective identification to resist global capitalism and the corporate-state mergers that have distorted democracy.” (Grattan, 145) However, it is also worth noting the difference in approach between Occupy and the Tea Party movement.
Party movement appealed to strong conservatives within the Republican Party, Occupy Wall Street appealed across demographics with its phrase “we are the 99%”. Laura Grattan calls this a ‘horizontalization’ or decentralization of popular power, in contrast to the Tea Party movement, which was ironically, an attempt to centralize power into a few key members of Congress for political change. However, it would also be this “horizontalism” that would cause significant problems for the Occupy movement. Unlike the Tea Party, the Occupy Wall Street movement was extremely disorganized with very few effective leaders or central voices. Furthermore, because it tried to encompass “the 99%”, it failed to unify a plurality of voices and ideologies that ranged from anarchism to communism. There was seemingly no objective solution presented by the Occupy movement. In contrast, the Tea Party’s objective goal of influencing Congress through political pressure or electing more conservative voices was an end-game goal, and quite effective. The Tea Party was extremely effective at galvanizing electoral support, an area in which the Occupy movement objectively failed. The Occupy movement was born out of frustration with an entire political and economic system, while the Tea Party was born out of frustration with individual party members. Not only were the goals of Occupy lofty, they were unachievable in comparison to the goal of the Tea Party. In fact, the only seemingly noticeable outcome the Occupy movement had on the political landscape is an openness to Bernie Sanders. Prior to the Occupy movement, Bernie Sanders was a fringe Socialist party member with a very small following and it is very likely that his rise in the
Democratic primaries can be directly attributed to the Occupy Wall Street movement shifting the debate.

One crucial aspect of populism, particularly in its earliest forms but also currently, is nationalism. There are two subsets of nationalism. The first is the idea that a country’s primary focus should be maximizing the well-being of its citizens. The second subset of nationalism is the idea of a national identity that citizens should conform to. This second subset is less concerned with political aspects of a nation and more concerned with the racial and ethnic aspects of the nation, often referred to as ethno-nationalism. Populist parties have difficulty maintaining this balance as the two are often intrinsically linked between insiders and outsiders. Maximizing the well-being of citizenry inherently requires that there are insiders and outsiders. Sam Pryke notes two different theories surrounding nationalism; the first was prominent prior to World War II and it is the theory that nations, while not necessarily ethnically homogenous, were consistent over time. In contrast, modernist theories surrounding nationalism are substantially different. Pryke says, “The modernist account of nations and nationalism denies, by contrast, that there is any intrinsic relationship between ethnicity and nationalism. Instead, the various writers associated with this approach argue that nations and nationalism are of far more recent vintage, the product of social, economic, and political transformations of the past 250 years of human history.” (Pryke, 4) In other words, the idea of nationalism is a relatively new invention in history, but correlated with
the birth of America. Adrian Hastings, a critic of this view of nationalism, says “a nation is a far more self-conscious community than an ethnicity. Formed from one or more ethnicities it possesses or claims the right to political identity and autonomy as a people, together with control of a specified territory.” (Hastings, 10) This view of nationalism is a very American-centric view of nationalism, in part because America was born out of a political and cultural identity among pluralistic ethnicities. The same is true for parts of Europe, particularly in countries like Belgium or in the Balkans where there is high ethnic divide. However, it could be argued that there are stronger sentiments of nationalism within Europe particularly because they have not had the same degree of ethnic mixing that has been a hallmark of American life. Given Europe’s extensive and ugly history with ethnicity, particularly of the Jews, it seems that Hastings model begins to break down. Certainly, in some parts of Europe there is an undeniable link between ethnicity and nation (countries like Germany and France which have both a strong national identity and high level of ethnic homogenization). However, America and Europe have substantially different experiences with nationalism. In fact, applying Hastings view of nationalism to America would further debunk the link between populism and ethnic nationalism. Sam Pryke has a different view on the rise of nationalism; he says, “So nations give rise to nationalism and nationalists demand nation-states to further their interests.” (Pryke, 5) He subscribes to the notion that as nations solidified their borders and their culture, sentiments of nationalism began to develop. Yet, this nationalism is predicated on the idea that nations have an obligation first and
foremost to their citizens and citizens respond by giving a nation’s government its legitimacy. It is this form of nationalism that many modern populist movements have pointed to; essentially, the idea of ‘a government for the people and by the people’.

The Fragment Theory

The “Fragment Theory” is the idea that fringe political parties are able to garner political support by dividing constituents of other parties on key political issues that are poorly addressed by mainstream parties. It is a “divide and conquer” political strategy that pulls from the disillusioned and disenfranchised voters of mainstream political parties. It has limited applicability in the United States given that the strategy is often used for the formation of new parties. Furthermore, the strength of both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party limits the accessibility for competing parties. However, within the United States the “fragment theory” is fairly effective at influencing policy through competing interest groups and grassroots movements. On the contrary, the “fragment theory” is much more applicable in Europe given that many nations have a multi-party system. Within these countries the ideological differences between the parties is much less drastic, the parties often require a coalition to govern, and the barrier for new parties is less severe. Thus, it creates a ripe atmosphere for new parties to emerge and pull constituents from existing parties. This section of the paper will examine the
“fragment theory” as it applies within the United States and Europe and how it affects policy and election outcomes.

**The Fragment Theory in the United States**

The “fragment theory’s” limited applicability mainly stems from the dominance of the Republican Party and the Democratic Party, which have existed since the early 1800’s. Yet, this is also largely the result of the adaptability of both parties. While rare, political shifts and the dual nature of the American political system allow for more flexibility within the parties and limited choices for the public. This in turn, limits the effect of the “fragment theory” introducing new political parties, but may also increase the effect that voting blocs can have. This is most notable with recent grassroots movements such as the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street movements which have been explored earlier in this paper. Both were able to shift political discussion considerably.

The Occupy Wall Street movement shifted the Democrat platform heavily around the ideas of corporate greed, wage disparities, and student loan debt. This very likely led to the rise of Bernie Sanders as a candidate, that would have been unlikely previously. The Tea Party movement shifted the Republican Party towards more conservative policies. Both of these movements fragmented the current political parties and, ultimately, demanded a change in platform from both Democrats and Republicans. Given the dual nature of the American political system, rather than the formation of new, competing parties like in Europe, this fragmentation led to responses from both parties. However, the Tea Party movement did lead to some discussion of new political parties and
ultimately several congressional blocs such as the Freedom Caucus and the Tea Party Caucus. Yet, the “fragment theory” in America is quite different than modern advocacy groups. Advocacy groups often advocate for a single issue or policy rather than a mainstream political shift which is seen with populist movements in the United States and also Europe. For example, the National Rifle Association is largely only concerned with gun rights for its constituency. The political ramifications are ultimately based on the political responses from each party. However, in the case of the Tea Party and Occupy movements, it was a large scale uprising from within the parties that demanded a political shift rather than outside advocacy groups. Thus, while the “fragment theory” has limited applicability in America, it often manifests in the form of political backlash from significant voting blocs within each party and demands a political response from within the parties rather than from outside.

**The Fragment Theory in Europe**

The “fragment theory” most aptly describes the success of populist movements within Europe. Eurosceptic groups have capitalized on a lack of representation and frustration that voters have felt towards mainstream political parties. The most notable example of the fragment theory has been the United Kingdom Independence Party. Led by Nigel Farage, UKIP exploded from a fringe movement to a major political rival for the Conservatives and Labour Party. UKIP first began in the early 1990’s when a significant schism occurred within the Conservative Party. Thatcher Conservatives and
Single-Market Conservatives disagreed on the issue of the party’s position towards the European Union. Conservatives universally supported the Single European Act of 1990 which created a single market with the prospects of free trade. However, Thatcher Conservatives rejected the prospects of a united Europe and one that demanded economic and political integration. This sentiment of free trade and cooperation without further integration has been echoed by Farage and UKIP. However, this split was finalized when Thatcher was pushed out in 1990 and ultimately replaced with John Major, a Conservative who supported the Treaty of Maastricht on the grounds of the single-market.\(^5\) This divide between Thatcher Conservatives and John Major Conservatives ultimately led to the creation of UKIP. Indeed, it was the Treaty of Maastricht that would ultimately change the direction of the European Union forever. Renee Buhr argues that the emergence of single-issue parties across Europe was only possible with the ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht. She argues, “while the radical right and far left may have had different reasons for opposing the Treaty of the European Union [Maastricht], they both took up this position in opposition to what many scholars have dubbed a pro-integration consensus among mainstream political parties. When radical right or left parties took up anti-integration positions, it appears they met the demands in that share of the electorate for this policy position. What is clear is that the share of the electorate voting for these parties, particularly the radical right, increased in number of

\(^5\) John Major was the Conservative Prime Minister who replaced Thatcher from 1992 to 1997. He was largely ineffective due to in-fighting within the Conservatives and his inability to quell it.
member states in the post-Maastricht era.” (Buhr, 2012). As Buhr notes, populists on both sides, the labor-based left and the far right had split from the more centrist ideologies of their previous mainstream parties. The Treaty of Maastricht ultimately created a situation in which mainstream parties that supported the treaty crashed towards the center towards integration while fringe parties or those that rejected the European Union were polarized to the extremes. She says, “radical right and far left parties were in an ideal position to address that share of the population that opposed new level of integration proposed by Maastricht, whether those objections were economic or identity-based.” (Buhr, 2012). Thus, newly emerged Eurosceptic Parties were able to fulfill a unique political position, the ability to capture constituents from a wide array of political ideologies. Thus, Buhr’s argument affirms the initial foundations of the “fragment theory” that the divide between pro-EU and Eurosceptic parties was only possible as a result of the Treaty of Maastricht. Robert Ford and Matthew Goodwin also support this view. They argue, “It is this popular assumption that has led some commentators such as Matthew Parris, to reject the portrayal of UKIP as a political party in its own right, and to instead frame the movement as a ‘mutiny within Conservatism’. The reality, however, is quite different. Whether knowingly or not, Nigel Farage and his party have mobilized into politics, social and economic division that have existed for decades.” (Goodwin, 2014). As UKIP continues to grow and succeed the assertion by Parris and others who claim UKIP is nothing more than a “mutiny” becomes more absurd. Simply on the basis that a significant portion of the UKIP voter-base are former Labour Party voters
demonstrates that it is more than a band of disgruntled Conservative voters. Ford and Goodwin support this claim, saying, “We find that UKIP has the most working-class following in British politics – the most working class following, in fact, since Michael Foot led the Labour Party in the 1983 general election. Aside from their social-demographic profile, a detailed analysis of the motivations of UKIP voters revealed that most are driven by a ‘Brussels-plus’ outlook; while the party’s supporters are universally Eurosceptic, Euroscepticism alone is not enough to deliver many voters into UKIP’s camp – the vast majority combine hostility to the EU with strong concerns about immigration, dissatisfaction with the functioning of British politics, and negative views about the performance of both Labour and Conservatives on immigration and the post-2008 financial crisis.” (Goodwin, 2014). Thus, the “fragment theory” aptly describes the rise of UKIP. It has risen beyond just a mere single-issue party based solely on the rejection of the European Union, but has also garnered considerable support because of the failures of other mainstream political parties.

**The Feedback Loop Theory**

The “Feedback Loop” theory is the idea that the media and extremist candidates have a mutual symbiotic relationship. The media relies on extremist candidates for sound bites, ratings, and “clicks” to increase viewership and ultimately advertisement revenue.
Extremist candidates rely on the mainstream media for news coverage and legitimacy.

The ability for Donald Trump to consistently appear in the news as “2016 Presidential hopeful” or “2016 Republican candidate” only served to legitimize his campaign. It is important to note that while Trump was largely a media creation, that does not necessarily mean he was well liked by the media. This section of the paper focuses on the “feedback loop” theory and the role of the media in populist movements.

**The Feedback Loop theory in American Politics**

The saying “there’s no such thing as bad press” certainly could not be more true for Donald Trump. The media often plays a crucial role in the rise of the extremist parties. The two intrinsically feed off each other. Donald Trump, in particular, was exceptional at drumming up outrage with his statements; yet these comments only seemed to fuel his popularity. For many, Trump was the candidate willing to say things no other candidate would dream of saying. They may not have agreed with him, but his rhetoric was a welcomed change to the almost robotic responses that had become commonplace in Washington D.C.

Throughout the election cycle, the media gave considerable more coverage to the Trump campaign over the Clinton campaign. Trump’s rhetoric was often considered inflammatory by media elites, but additionally, his scandals received far more air time than Clinton’s scandals. According to a study by The Media Research Center, 91% of the coverage towards Trump was considered hostile (Noyes, 2016). They also found that
Trump received roughly 440 minutes of airtime compared to that of Clinton’s 185 minutes of air time (Noyes, 2016). Donald Trump’s treatment of women received by far the most coverage, nearly double the amount of time that was allotted to the next two largest scandals. Two of Clinton’s largest scandals, the Clinton Foundation’s “pay-to-play” scandal and the email scandal, received slightly more air time than several minor Trump scandals.

![Figure A](https://example.com/figureA.png)

*Source: MediaResearchCenter*

The coverage marked considerable discrepancy in news coverage between the candidates and affirmed some of the criticisms of media bias. Yet, it also marked the effectiveness of the Trump campaign’s ability to create headlines. Trump and the Republican Party seemingly faced an insurmountable task of defeating Clinton and the ability for Trump to
remain a headline news story became a major driving force for his campaign. While he received a significantly more negative coverage, Trump was also able to keep Clinton out of the headlines. *Figure A* demonstrates how the “feedback loop” plays a significant role in both the types of coverage a candidate experiences and the amount of coverage a candidate receives. Many of Trump’s largely irrelevant controversies took up considerable air time. On the contrary, Clinton’s “deplorables” comment received only seven minutes of coverage and her handling of Benghazi as Secretary of State received less than two minutes of coverage. Trump was able to convert this heavily biased media coverage of Clinton into more air time for his own campaign. He criticized the media for its bias and called it “fake news” and claimed that the election was “rigged”. This in turn, created a media firestorm against Trump and thus, more air time. Yet, the move paid off for Trump not only with more coverage of his campaign but it exposed a deep distrust for the American media that had been long growing. According to a Quinnipiac University poll, nearly 55% of Americans felt that the media had an unfair bias against Trump (McCaskill, 2016). Of those polled, nearly 60% of those that identified as independent agreed that the media was biased against Trump. In a study by University of Indiana professors Lars Willnat and David H. Weaver, 60% of the American public feels that the news media is “headed in the wrong direction” (Willnat, 1). Thus, Trump was able to create considerable media outrage while also deflecting a large portion of this criticism as “fake” news. Ultimately, this allowed Donald Trump to discern which news was “true” and which was “fake”. Additionally, it created a situation in which virtually all of the
negative news coverage of Trump only confirmed his criticism and the American perception that the media was biased against him. This allowed Trump to deflect a large portion of criticism, and rather than damaging Trump’s campaign, it only served to fuel it.

Despite overwhelmingly negative media coverage Trump still managed to do relatively well in the polls. Donald Trump and conservatives have criticized media coverage of Trump and fellow Republicans. According Lars Willnat and David Weaver, just 7% of reporters considered themselves Republicans compared to 28.1% that considered themselves Democrats (Willnat, 9). While the vast majority of reporters considered themselves Independent, the 7.1% marked a significant and consistent decline in the number of reporters identifying as Republican since the 1970’s. Examining Figure B, it becomes clear that Republican presence in the media has sharply declined and has fueled speculation and criticism from conservatives that the media is biased against Trump and the Republican Party.
While the number of reporters identifying as Democrat has also declined, the decline in representation has been far less drastic than the decline in Republican representation. Additionally, more reporters identify as Independent than in previous decades, yet as Willnat and Weaver point out, this is fairly consistent with the public's shift away from party identification. In addition to record low levels of Republican representation, media outlets became notorious for funding the Democratic party. George Stephanopoulos faced criticism for failing to disclose his $75,000 donation to the Clinton Foundation while reporting on both the Clinton Foundation and campaign (Gerstein, 2015). However, media outlets have donated to candidates throughout history; some questioned
the criticism of journalists donating to major candidates. But to the American public, particularly Trump supporters and moderates, it appeared that the media and Clinton campaign were colluding for a Clinton victory. A study by the Center for Public Integrity found that journalists donated $396,000 between the candidates, Trump and Clinton. Of that $396,000 nearly all of it went to Clinton. The organization found that $382,000 or 96% of all money donated in the 2016 Presidential election benefitted Clinton (Mills, 2016). The report only confirmed what Trump, Pence and his supporters had railed against for months. For the rest of the American public, it called into question the media’s ability to be objective and unbiased.

The “feedback loop” theory created a perfect storm for the Trump campaign. Trump’s criticisms of the media and wild rhetoric kept his campaign in the headlines while the media also benefitted from these headlines. Yet, Trump was able to deflect a significant portion of the criticisms levied at his campaign because of a substantial amount of distrust between the public and the media. This in turn created a very lopsided “feedback loop” between the media and Trump. He was effectively able to benefit from the increased media exposure while deflecting a large amount of the criticism. This is a marked departure from other populist movements and candidates which are often subjected to heavy criticism in addition to increased media exposure. Trump largely nullified this criticism by focusing his campaign message around a “fake and biased” media and a Washington elite that was trying to preserve itself.
The Feedback Loop Theory in European Politics

UKIP and other populist movements have also experienced the same media sensationalism that Donald Trump has experienced. In a piece on *New Statesman*, Matthew Goodwin and Robert Ford argue “Farage receives a level of publicity that is not only disproportionate to his party’s actual strength, but also exceeds that given to other insurgents who have achieved what UKIP has not; a seat in Westminster.” (Goodwin, 2013) Yet, despite UKIP and Farage’s failures at the national level, as Goodwin and Ford note, they have achieved resounding success at the European level. *Figure C* measures the number of citations for UKIP and Farage beginning in 2003, before UKIP had more than three MEPs, up until November 2013 when they were on the cusp of winning the 2014 European Parliamentary elections outright.
Figure C

“Clearly much of this marks a response to UKIP’s growth in the polls. But whereas UKIP enjoyed record gains in 2004 and 2009, the media attention it won after these breakthroughs is dwarfed by the wave of coverage it received in the past two years. In 2012, UKIP mentions reached a record high of over 10,000, but so far in 2013 this figure has already more than doubled again, with two months of the year still left to run.” (Goodwin, 2013) Ford and Goodwin also measure UKIP’s media coverage in relation to other fringe parties.

Figure D
Despite considerable growth for UKIP in 2004 and 2009, it remained relatively consistent in media coverage with other fringe parties until 2011 when it came unto its own. While Goodwin and Ford assert that UKIP and Farage have received media coverage exceeding its representation, Figure D seems to indicate the contrary for the first several years of UKIP’s rise. Rather, UKIP was seemingly underrepresented by the media until roughly 2011, especially in comparison to fringe counterparts, such as the Greens and British National Party (BNP) which have been relatively invisible to the public. Goodwin and Ford also measured Farage’s representation in comparison to other fringe leaders.

![Figure E](image-url)
As they noted, Farage was relatively obscure until 2012 in which he saw significant media coverage. Once again, Farage was fairly underrepresented given the status of UKIP relative to other fringe parties. Goodwin and Ford’s research seems to indicate that UKIP was not given the same recognition as mainstream parties despite significant gains in 2004 and 2009. However, in 2012 both Farage and UKIP noticed a meteoric rise in coverage. While UKIP has largely been considered a fringe party since its inception, it was undeniable that it had transcended to a major political force.

The Populist Revolt of 2016 and the Future of Populism

2016 noted a remarkable year in populist backlash. While populist movements have seen success sporadically throughout history, they are increasingly effective at introducing both political and social change. Given the success of populist movements in Europe and recently the United States, it begs the question if political parties are fading in favor political movements. This portion of the paper examines why Trump won the 2016 presidential election, why Europe is a populist hotbed, and the future of populism.

The Triumph of Trump

Donald Trump was largely the product of being the right candidate at the right time. He knew how to play the political game and perhaps unknowingly tapped into a
political force that felt disdain for political elites. Donald Trump is an elite, but he was also a political outsider that was seemingly resented by both establishment Republicans and establishment Democrats. For Republicans, he was a loose cannon and a candidate that was unknown for his celebrity status rather than political prowess. Many in the Republican camp feared his wild rhetoric and lack of political expertise would be difficult to overcome, especially with the likelihood of an experienced Clinton campaign. Democrats underestimated Trump’s appeal to working-class Americans and the weakness of the Clinton strategy. Yet, even some prominent Democrat figures worried about Trump. Michael Moore, in his documentary, *Trumpland*, predicted that states such as Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania would go in favor of Trump. He called them the “Brexit states” because he predicted they would shock the nation by giving Trump the presidency. He said,

“I know a lot of people in Michigan that are planning to vote for Trump. They don’t necessarily like him that much and they don’t necessarily agree with him. They’re not bad people; they’re not racists or rednecks. They’re actually pretty decent people. Donald Trump came to the Detroit economic club and stood there in front of a Ford executive and said, ‘if you close these factories, as you are planning to do in Detroit, and build them in Mexico, I’m going to put a 35% tariff on those cars when you send them back and no one is going to buy them’. It was an amazing thing to see. No politician, Democrat or Republican, had ever said
anything like that to these executives. It was music to the ears of the people of Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin; the Brexit states… It’s why every beaten down, nameless, forgotten working stiff who used to be part of what was called the middle class loves Trump. He is the human Molotov cocktail that they’ve been waiting for. The human hand grenade they can legally throw into the system that stole their lives from them. And on November 8th, election day, although they lost their jobs, although they’ve been foreclosed on by the bank, next came the divorce, and now the wife and kids are gone. The car has been repo’d, they haven’t had a real vacation in years, they’re stuck with the shitty Obamacare bronze plan where you can’t even get a fucking Percocet. They have essentially lost everything they had except one the thing. The one thing that doesn’t cost them a cent and is guaranteed to them by the American Constitution; the right to vote. They might be penniless, they might be homeless, they might be fucked over or fucked up, but it doesn’t matter because it’s equalized on that day. A millionaire has the same number of votes as a person without a job, one. And there’s more of the former middle class than there are of the millionaires.”

(Moore, 2016)

Moore noted the sentiments that many blue-collar workers in middle America felt. Whether Donald Trump truly meant to keep his promises was irrelevant to the disenfranchised, white voters in the Rust Belt. He was saying the things that no politician
had said to them. Certainly, neither Clinton nor the Democratic Party were going to promise to bring the jobs to their factories. Journalist John Heilemann in his special *The Circus* shared Michael Moore’s sentiments on election night. “For about half the country, their lives have sucked for the past 25 years while the rest of us have been doing fine. They have no real hope that their lives are going to get better and their attitude was, ‘you know what, that guy is risky, but doing the same thing over and over again for the next 20 years that we’ve done for the last 20 years and didn’t fix anything, that’s risky too. I’m willing to take these risks and roll a stick of dynamite into Washington D.C. and blow it up and see where the rubble falls’…. Really it’s the collapse of trust in all institutions that is playing across all western democracies.” (Heilemann, 2016) Perhaps the coastal elites were oblivious to the struggle that millions of working class voters in the Midwest had felt for the better part of the past decade. Most working-class Americans had felt their lifestyle had declined considerably. According to the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), which measured the 2016 election in their piece *Beyond Economies: Fears of Cultural Displacement Pushed the White Working Class to Trump*, nearly as many white working-class voters had felt their lifestyle had declined as it had improved. This is in considerable contrast to college-educated white voters who are nearly three times as likely to say their financial circumstances have improved since childhood. (Cox, 2017) Yet, what is perhaps most remarkable about *Figure F* is the contrast between older working-class voters and younger voters. If the Age 65+ bracket was to be isolated, the clear majority of white working-class voters between the ages of
18 and 64 have noticed a decline in their financial circumstance. The fact that nearly half of all working-class voters have expressed a stagnation in financial standards is enough to warrant concern on its own. However, even more telling, according to PRRI, an equal number of working-class and college-educated voters, approximately 44%, reported that their social standing has remained the same from childhood to adulthood.

![Change in Financial Circumstance Between Childhood and Adulthood](image)

**Figure F**

Despite the struggles of millions of working-class voters, the Clinton strategy did not seem to involve white, blue-collar voters at all. As noted by Doug Wead in his book *Game of Thorns*, Hillary Clinton ignored many of the voters that her husband, Bill, had relied on in his road to the White House. He says, “They [the Clintons] were deaf to the needs of the blue-collar voters who had lost their jobs all across America. It was one
thing to say in public, out of loyalty, that things were great, but Obama wasn’t running, she was running, and people didn’t believe things were great. Whatever happened to ‘it’s the economy stupid’?” (Wead, 36) For the Clinton campaign, the economy and hurting workers of America seemed to be the last thing on her mind. Hillary seemed more focused on trying to persuade minority voters, who had ushered Barack Obama into the White House, to vote for her. She had not only ignored these voters, but in some instances outright rejected them. Wead noted this rejection with Catholic organizations. “Bill Clinton was reportedly still furious over the campaign’s refusal to speak at a Saint Patrick’s Day event months earlier at Notre Dame. Catholics wanted to vote for them, if the campaign would just give them a chance. It was as if Hillary’s campaign didn’t want them.” (Wead, 36) Trump faced considerable criticism from Christian groups, particularly Evangelical groups for his multitude of marriages and comments regarding the treatment of women. Yet, Trump knew he needed Evangelical Christians in his constituency, particularly because most of them hailed from the Midwest and South were he drew much of his support. According to the PRRI, nearly 71% of white working-class Americans identified as Christian. Despite the fact that many young working-class voters are religiously unaffiliated, Clinton’s decision to ignore such a significant portion of the voter-base proved detrimental (Cox, 2017).
The Rise of Populist Europe

The most notable political success for populist movements comes in Europe. European populism is often characterized as Euroscepticism. Euroscepticism is a rejection of the idea of an integrated Europe and the belief in national sovereignty as opposed to supranational entities. This ideology is a total rejection of the formation of the European Union rather than merely skepticism towards a Brussels-centered political union. This important distinction is what separates parties like the United Kingdom Independence Party or National Front in France from other parties such as the Tories. The primary objective of Eurosceptic parties is to oversee the disintegration of the European Union. On the contrary, some parties, such as the En Marche! are more skeptical when dealing with Brussels, but are still pro-EU. This distinction is crucial because it sets the tone for these political movements both in local elections as well as the European Parliament. The European Freedom and Direct Democracy group, which is at the center of Euroscepticism in the European Parliament, has been the most successful Eurosceptic bloc. The European Union is heavily criticized for being fairly unresponsive to democratic concerns or opinions. At the root of this criticism are the structural problems the EU faces that make it difficult to respond to public demands. While many

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6 The European Freedom and Direct Democracy group is sometimes referred to as the EFDD or their previous acronym, EFD, which was European Freedom and Democracy. They rebranded to the “Direct Democracy” tag to emphasize the popular vote. It is also important to note that while a voting bloc, they are composed of individual MEPs and a plurality of parties, they themselves are not a single entity nor does that mean they necessarily vote like one.
EU institutions and even citizens can contribute and influence the law, it is only the European Commission that can submit proposals to parliament. The Commission is also responsible for setting the legislative agenda. This in turn, creates a bottleneck effect in which the commissioner is the only official who can bring forth new laws. While the President of the EU, head of the European Commission, is an elected position, the president is elected via secret ballot by the 28 other officials in the EU Commission. One of the hallmarks of a representative democracy is examining how a representative voted and holding them accountable for their vote. European officials are not accountable to the European public for their vote and ultimately, because the commission is the only body that can bring forth legislation, it essentially allows legislation to be brought to a vote without any accountability. This process is further complicated by the fact that the European Union has a mechanism for a secret ballot on legislation. According to the European Union’s Rule 169, “any vote may be subject to secret ballot should at least one-fifth of the parliament motion before the vote begins.” (Europarl, 2013) In essence, the Commission is not accountable for the legislation that is put forth, nor is the legislative body, the European Parliament, responsible for the way it votes. This has created an elevated level of distrust between the European populace and the European Parliament. While it is often used sparingly by the parliamentary body, it has occurred on a number of occasions since the 2008 financial crisis. Secret ballot motions are most frequently called for budgetary concerns. In 2013, then-President Martin Schulz of Germany
motioned for and granted a secret ballot for the European Union’s 2014 budget. He argued “that an eventual agreement would not be an ‘end point’ but a basis for negotiations with the parliament for introducing more flexibility into the EU budget.”

(Euractiv, 2013) While Schulz may refer to this as flexibility, members of the European Conservatives and Reformists group (ERC) argued that this flexibility was only possible as a resultant of removing accountability. Martin Callanan said, "This kind of behaviour brings the EU and politicians into disrepute. My group will argue for a Roll Call Vote on any deal reached so that all MEPs can stand on the doorsteps in their constituencies and explain why they cannot support their Prime Minister." (Euractiv, 2013) Given that the budget is one of the most contentious and politically divisive issues in both European and America, it stands to reason the European public would be outraged. Furthermore, it exemplifies the disconnect between the European political elite’s thoughts on their role versus the public’s thoughts. Schulz highlights what Lukacs has called this form of “liberal elitism” which is to believe that there is a ruling elite that decides what is best for the public. On the basis that Schulz believes a private vote would give a major political advantage for their votes, it is evident that this distrust of the Democratic process is two-fold. The political elite do not trust the public and vice versa.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the European Union has been the economy. The initial founding of the European Union, the European Community, after World War II was based on maintaining peace and trade relationships between European countries. However, nearly four decades later, at the Treaty of Maastricht, the European
Community decided to adopt the Euro as the official currency for the European Union. The origination of the Euro is rooted in the attempt to prevent the domination of the Deutschmark across all of Europe. Yet, in effect, following the 2008 financial crisis, the Euro only re-affirmed the domination of German banks and the German Euro. Because the Euro is the currency for a multitude of nations, no nation individually has the capability of devaluing its currency. This proved crucial in extending and exacerbating the financial crisis in already struggling economies. The most notable will be Greece, a country which adopted the Euro in 2001 under false pretenses and banking irregularities which would later be exposed. In addition to Greece, other countries including Ireland, Spain, Portugal, and Italy have faced their own economic struggles following the 2008 financial collapse. Given the economic struggles, many in these countries have turned to blame the European Union and the European Central Bank for the financial crisis. Naturally, these countries are hotbeds for Eurosceptic groups. While most countries have only one Eurosceptic group, Greece has a multitude of Eurosceptic groups almost entirely because of the fiscal situation in Greece. Former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis spoke out vehemently about Greek financial instability and attempts by the European Union to relieve this debt. In an interview with Dave Rubin on The Rubin Report, Varoufakis noted that he was not in favor of the Euro initially, but believes it is now “too late to turn back”. He said:
“Back in the late 1900’s, a remarkable experiment in monetary economics took place in Europe. In our infinite wisdom, we Europeans tried to bind monetarily together, very different economies without any mechanism for deciding surpluses, for keeping checks and balances in capital inflows and outflows. Any kind of economic union was askewed and put on the backburner, while pushing forward in monetary union…… What happens, in every economy, in every currency union, there are surplus areas, like California and there are deficit areas like Missouri. In Europe, it’s Germany and Greece. Within Germany it’s Eastern Germany and Western Germany… and when that happens in a monetary union, there is a tendency for surpluses to travel to deficit areas in the form of loans. By definition, Germany always has and always will be a surplus country in relation to Greece, and what do bankers do when they have a surplus? The money comes in and it effectively beefs up asset prices, house prices and various other assets. That creates a semblance of growth… it really is nothing more than a Ponzi scheme.”

(Varoufakis, 2017)

Varoufakis highlights what some critics have noted as a fundamentally flawed monetary union. The Eurozone features countries with wildly different economies and industries. For Greece in particular, its largest industry is the tourism industry and as a result, is hit particularly hard by economic recessions. Yet, what further exacerbates these issues is the inability for Greece or any Eurozone country to devalue its currency in the wake of an
economic decline. Thus, given the substantial decline in the Greek economy and the failures of Greek banks, there once again became a divide between the strength of the Germany Euro and the Greek Euro. Varoufakis explains how this problem became significantly worse at the hands of European officials:

“You cannot do what Argentina did; you cannot sever the peg and devalue the currency… so the creditors come here, and this is the crime against logic that was committed in May of 2010; we had the Greek state which was bankrupt, there was no way it could overthrow its debt, it did not have a currency it could devalue, and it did not have a central bank. Imagine 2008 in the United States without the Fed and without the capacity to devalue the dollar. So, what did they do? It is quite astonishing, they came to the Greek state and said, ‘we will bail you out’, but of course it wasn’t even a bail out, what they did was they gave to the Greek state the largest amount of money in humanity’s history in absolute terms. Remember Greece is a tiny little place, 2% of the European economy, it’s the Delaware of Europe. Imagine if the powers that be; the IMF, the Fed, the Treasury, the World Bank to descend upon Delaware and gave them the largest sum in human history on conditions of austerity [that] are guaranteed to shrink the income of the people living there… What I think most Americans understand is that you cannot escape bankruptcy through loans.” (Varoufakis, 2017)
What Varoufakis does not disclose is that Greece was “bailed out” numerous times during this financial crisis, each time through the condition of austerity and loans. This crippled the Greek economy even further and he believed that European officials have a flawed perspective and incorrectly believed that Greece economic woes could be alleviated through loans. Yet, these failures also came on the heels of Greek banking irregularities prior to joining the Euro. The fault lines were initially realized in 2004 when Greek ministers admitted to falsifying data to gain entry into the Eurozone. This subsequently set off a chain reaction in which Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish banks also reported irregularities. Former European President Jose Manuel Barroso blamed North America for the 2008 financial crisis at the G20 summit in 2012 (The Telegraph, 2012), and to some degree he was correct. However, that criticism was lost on the working classes and unemployed in those countries. Greece and Spain have consistently maintained the highest levels of unemployment in Europe, often exceeding over 25%. Furthermore, it ignores the structural problems the Euro faced. While Barroso may not admit it, the structure of the Euro largely exacerbated the crisis as did the response by the European Bank.

The Future of Populism

It has been said, “if you’re not a liberal at twenty, you have no heart. If you are not a conservative at thirty-five, you have no brain.” However, today’s young voters may already be going on thirty-five. Recent studies indicate that young voters are more
conservative now than in previous generations. If populism is going to have a lasting impact on the political landscape, young voters are going to have to be the demographic that carries it forward in the 21st century. A study published in the British Journal of Political Sciences found that young British voters are “exceptionally more conservative” than previous generations. The study led by Stephen Farrall et al. suggested that Margaret Thatcher and the ideas of “Thatcherism” had a significant impact on young people’s views of welfare, crime, and the economy. (Farrall, 17) Thatcher, a Eurosceptic herself, would seemingly have also influenced young voters opinions of the European Union. However, despite young voters “becoming more conservative” Eurosceptic candidate Nigel Farage and UKIP flopped with them. Other populist candidates, Trump and Geert Wilders, also did quite poorly with young voters. The only populist candidate who did well with young voters was Marine Le Pen. The Financial Times reported that Le Pen managed to claim a remarkable 39% of young voters while her competitors Macron sat at 21% and Francois Fillon trailed with an abysmal 9% of young French voters (“39% of French youngster backing Le Pen”, 2017). This marked departure from the norm, signifies a unique set of problems facing young French voters. While both Macron and Le Pen have noted that high youth unemployment is a problem for France, Le Pen has made it a focal point in her campaign while other French presidential candidates did not. With youth unemployment stuck at nearly 25% for the past few years in France, it has also been a focal point for young voters as well. Gaëtan Dussausaye, the 23-year-old youth leader of National Front, said “we’ve been told our whole lives that
everything is set. Free trade. Forgetting our borders. One currency for all of Europe.

Nothing can change. But young people don’t like this system. This system is a failure.” (White, 2017) While young voters are seemingly less concerned with immigration, the free movement of peoples, and multi-culturalism, for the French voters, the Euro represents a real threat to their economic prospects. Despite Le Pens being considered far right, she has taken on many social policies when it comes to the economy; some of these positions are even supported by socialist parties. Particularly her policies regarding the regulation of bread prices, her tariff policies, and policies regarding youth unemployment that made her a popular candidate among some voters. Furthermore, Le Pen has led National Front beyond its deep anti-Semitic and white nationalist views espoused by her father and previous candidates. Le Pen even went as far as to ban her father from the party and kicked out all other white supremacists and anti-Semites. Young voters were too young to vote for her father in the 2002 French presidential elections and they were too young to remember National Front as a party of racism. Despite this, Marine Le Pen’s bid for the French Presidency failed, alongside Geert Wilders’ bid for the Dutch prime minister position, both of which were substantial setbacks for populism in 2017.

There is no doubt, Europe is becoming more right-wing. It appears that since 2000 the message of globalism has been declining quite rapidly in appeal. While 2016 may appear to be the outlier, make no mistake, populist sentiments have been building over time. The success of the UKIP, National Front, Five Star Movement, among many
others indicates that populism, at least in Europe, may be a long-term reality. The *New York Times* measured precisely how far to the right Europe has shifted. Out of the twenty countries they examined nearly all of them had experienced a growth in right-wing sentiments or remained relatively steady.

*Figure G*
Examining *Figure G*, only Spain and Portugal have not had a significant growth in right-wing success.\(^7\) The most notable growth in right-wing ideology is in Austria, Hungary, and Poland which have seen marked increases. (Aisch, 2017) It is important to note that this view into Europe is fairly limited in explaining populism, while populism in the United States is almost exclusively limited to right wing ideology, in Europe it is much more nuanced and diverse given the prominence of labor parties which generally fear the free movement of peoples and goods. While Greece has not seen a dramatic rise in right-wing parties, it has seen a dramatic rise in populist and Eurosceptic parties which have many of the same goals as populist, right-wing parties. Additionally, given the uncertainty of Hungary, Austria, and Poland’s membership in the European Union, Eurosceptic populism may score another serious victory in the near future. If any of these nations were to leave the European Union in addition to Britain, it would raise fundamental questions about both the legitimacy and longevity of the European Union.

While the financial crisis certainly left a black mark on the European Union and economic integration, it has recently been the migrant crisis that has propelled these nations to the brink of leaving the European Union. The future of populism in Europe hinges on decisions made surrounding these issues. If the migrant crisis continues to pose

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\(^7\) This is very likely due to Spanish history with dictatorship and far right-wing ideology. However, it is worth noting that the political party *Podemos*, a left-wing populist party, has had marginal success. There are Eurosceptic movements in Spain, however most of them are left leaning ironically.
as a central issue for these nations and a compromise cannot be reached, it poses a serious threat to the survival of the European Union.

In America, while Trump performed quite poorly with younger voters, among white, working-class voters he did quite well. The PRRI, found a significant gap between young, working-class voters and their generational counterparts. Nearly 57% of white, working-class young adults identified as Republican, while only 29% identify as Democrat (Cox, 2017). What is also remarkable is the generational gap between younger and older working-class voters in which there is a considerably higher number of voters who strongly identify as Democrat. Furthermore, the PRRI study found that young, working-class adults are more than twice as likely to identify as conservative. Nearly 43% of young, working-class voters identified as conservative while only 21% identified as liberal (Cox, 2017).
Historian Yuval Noah Harari describes this as the new political divide. He even went as far as to say the idea of right and left is largely irrelevant, “The old, 20th century political model of left versus right is largely irrelevant and the real divide today is between global and national or global and local.” (Harari, 2017) In his TED Talk, he explained why this shift occurred. “Humans think in stories and we try to make sense of the world by telling stories. And for the last few decades, we had a very simple and attractive story about what is happening in the world. And the story said, what is happening is that the economy is being globalized, politics is being liberalized, and the combination of the two will create paradise on Earth. And we just need to keep globalizing the economy and liberalizing the system and everything will be wonderful.

2016 was when a good portion of the world stopped believing in this story.” It was not necessarily that substantial portions of the population stopped believing in the story as much as an outright rejection of the story. It is now clear that the populists largely feel that globalization has gone too far, and in some instances nations have sacrificed too much for the sake of globalization. Part of this assessment is undeniable; when nations join supranational entities they inevitably give up some national sovereignty. This is most evident with the European Union, which by the nature of membership, demands further integration. In essence, the European Union demands that countries give up some degree of national sovereignty to become a member. This is particularly troubling especially
with the economic crisis and migrant crisis which has resulted in a significant divide
within the European Union. Harari said, “I think the underlying feeling is that something
is broken within the political system, it does not empower the ordinary person anymore,
it does not care so much about the ordinary person anymore, and I think this diagnosis of
the political disease is correct… I think what we are seeing is the natural human reaction,
if something doesn’t work, let us go back.” (Harari, 2017) Perhaps Harari is correct, and
the natural reaction is to turn away from globalism to nationalism. However, his
comments reveal that perhaps there are significant problems with the way globalism has
developed, particularly recently. He asserts, “Nationalism is not sufficient to tackle
global problems, such as climate change or technological disruption, that globalism is
capable of tackling… All of the major problems of the world today are global, in essence,
and they cannot be solved without some kind of global cooperation.” (Harari, 2017)
However, what Yuval Harari fails to recognize is that there are substantial problems
casted by extreme globalization that perhaps only nationalism can address. It may be true
that climate change and nuclear threats are best dealt with on a global level, but there
must also be a recognition that some problems, such as economic or immigration issues
cannot be tackled at a supranational level. As Harari argues, nationalism and patriotism
do have their place. He notes that nationalism has become increasingly conflated with
extremism; all forms of nationalism have been conflated with ethno-nationalism which is
a dangerous proposition itself. Harari concludes, “For many centuries, even thousands of
years, patriotism worked quite well. Of course, it led to some wars, but we shouldn’t focus too much on that, there are also many positive things from patriotism and the ability for a large number of people to care about each other, sympathize for one another, and come together for collective action.” (Harari, 2017)

**Final Thoughts**

This paper has served to provide an overview of the populism phenomena and explain its appeal. While I have intended for this paper to serve as a comprehensive overview of populism and Euroscepticism, it is also with the understanding that these are broad and deep topics that a single paper cannot fully explore. Thus, I have tried to explain two fundamental roots of populism: the “fragment theory” and the “feedback loop.” Yet, there are areas which can further be explored on this topic. First and most prominently is a further exploration of modern populism, particularly the Tea Party movement and Occupy Wall Street movement. While Richard Hofstadter’s work on populism in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s may have shed insight into early American populism, there is a lack of literature for 21st century populism, particularly within the United States. The second area of research which could be further explored surrounds Euroscepticism outside of Britain. There is a great deal of literature about British Euroscepticism and Britain’s unique, separate identity from mainland Europe. However,
given the recent success of Eurosceptic groups in countries such as Greece, Austria, Hungary, and Poland, there is a lack of literature dealing with the recent rise of Euroscepticism across the mainland continent. The third area in which research can be expanded is within the “fragment theory.” As noted by this paper, the fragment theory applies well to the European Union and particularly Eurosceptic groups, but given the narrow scope of populism within this paper it would be interesting if this model will hold up among other fringe movements and political ideologies.

Populism is undoubtedly one of the most important political phenomena as we move further into the 21st Century. Its rise has not been an isolated incident, but rather an accumulation of failures by politicians and political elites to address severe economic and social issues. Historically, populist revolts have often been a sign of major political and social upheaval and we are witnessing this upheaval unfold in real time. The significance of events such as the election of Donald Trump and Brexit should not be lost merely as populist backlashes, but rather the first movements of a massive political shift. Populism’s future, however, is far from certain. Given such political volatility and the penchant for young voters to reject populism, the sustainability of current iterations of populist backlash seems unlikely. However, as this paper has demonstrated, that does not preclude populist backlashes from occurring in the future, rather the opposite.
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