Democracy under siege: The psychology of the new populism.

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Abstract

Mudde (2013) has identified three essential characteristics shared by all populist philosophies: anti-establishment animus, authoritarianism and nativism. Those are the necessary components; specific populist movements may differ in many other respects. The question this paper poses is whether the underlying psychological and social factors that power the present populist trend are different, whether this new type of right wing populism leads to permanent changes which threaten Western democracies. The contemporary wave of populism takes place in a period of weakening attachment to democratic values, as demonstrated by the work of Foa and Mounk (2016): the fundamental beliefs regarding the importance of democratic values are weakening all over Europe and in the US. The "controlling idea" (Lifton, 1989) of right wing populism is not economics but identity. When identity is seen as being under attack, a psychological state of "totalism" (Lifton, 1989) ensues, leading to the rigid emphasizing of differences and the diminution of perceived similarities. The refugee crisis, the unpopular immigration policies, and the terrorist attacks increased xenophobia, isolationism and nativism. I believe that the advent of the post-truth society and the predominance of social media sites as legitimate sources of information amplified and distorted the facts, emphasizing emotional reactions and decreasing the role of analysis and logic. As Westen (2005) demonstrated, we tend to underestimate the role of emotions in political decision making. Hahl, Kim and Sivan (2018) have shown, that when groups suffer from a "crisis of legitimacy" they tend to see blatant violations of the truth as a proof of authenticity and become emotionality invested in those seen as supporting them. Combined with the disenfranchisement and diminution of the lower middle class, this tendency creates an ideal climate for populist demagoguery. The refugee crisis was distorted by populist politicians into a decision imposed by the EU, which threatened the national, cultural and religious identity of member states. This was particularly salient in East European countries where the fear of losing national identity due to engulfment by the EU and the perceived loss of autonomy, the continued economic and cultural integration problems (gay rights, abortion, the rights of minorities, the rights of refugees) have resulted in an increase in nationalism, isolationism, anti-EU illiberalism, authoritarianism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and in many cases the return of repressed fascistic content and of a conspiratorial- paranoid mindset. In fact, Eastern European states managed to see themselves as a minority under attack. In Western European countries, the ongoing diminution of the middle class, the effect of post-industrial crisis, which Guilluy (2014) named "post-industrial desertification," resulted in what

Monnat (2016) named a "desperation vote". I believe it is a fair generalization to assume that the dynamic in Western Europe and the US are similar. In addition to increased xenophobia, isolationism and nationalism, the advent of the post truth society created a fact free environment in which right wing populist propaganda flourished.

We are several years into a rightist populist surge in most of the Western democracies. The causes include perceived threats to national and cultural identity, to national independence, a weakening of the concept of nation state with its "inviolable borders" and a general dissatisfaction accompanied by a feeling of being wronged and of losing control. From a social psychological standpoint, at the individual and small group level, the social trends named above are mediated and integrated by using the constructs of collective identity and collective memory. In previous papers I tried to explore the neuropsychology, evolutionary psychology and dynamic psychology connections between populism and processes such as group identity and collective memory. However, I believe that the factors underlying the present outbreak of populism are different from previous iterations, as I will try to propose in the current paper. I believe that the mass influx of refugees, the effects of post-industrialization, the pervasiveness of social media, the spread of fake news and the advent of the post-truth society has significantly changed the nature of populist ideology by globalizing it. As Lilla (2018) noted "Something new is happening on the European right, and it involves more than xenophobic populist outbursts."

Mudde (2013) has identified three essential characteristics shared by all populist philosophies: anti-establishment animus, authoritarianism and nativism. Those are the necessary components; specific populist movements may differ in many other respects. The populist surge can be traced back, at least in part, to the decreasing attachment to democratic values, as demonstrated by the work of Foa and Mounk (2016) The fundamental beliefs regarding the importance of democratic values are weakening all over Europe and in the US.

Barber (1996) has described two "axial principles of our age": tribalism and globalism, two forces in conflict he named "McWorld" and "Jihad". The former represents a centripetal force for transnational and cross-cultural homogenization and integration, and tends to occur more in open societies while the latter is a centrifugal force for fragmentation, separatism and tribalism, occurring more often in closed societies, often based on national or religious identity.

For example, transnational companies and the European Union represent McWorld, and have been dominant for the last decades. However, when the national identity of the citizens of the member states came under pressure because of the massive influx of Middle Eastern refugees as well as because of a perceived loss of autonomy caused by an overbearing EU centralized bureaucracy and because of the perceived attack on morality and cultural values, the centrifugal force of "Jihad" has become prevalent. The proliferation of nationalist separatist movements as for example in Catalonia and Scotland, or Brexit on a larger scale, prove this point.

If Foa and Mounk's suppositions are correct, populism naturally fills the void left by the weakening commitment to democratic values. The increased tendency to fragmentation, isolationism and tribalism results in a significant shift: democracies seem to decay toward one of two solutions: "illiberal democracy"- the will of the majority loosely determines public policy but individual rights are regularly violated

"(as for instance in Hungary) or ""undemocratic liberalism" -individual rights are respected but the mechanism for translating the will of the people into public policy has broken down" (as for instance in those European countries where the majority opposition to admitting new refugees is overlooked.) Whether a country is rich or poor, and whether the prevailing trend had been McWorld or Jihad influences the outcome. The red arrow represent the present shift towards Jihad.

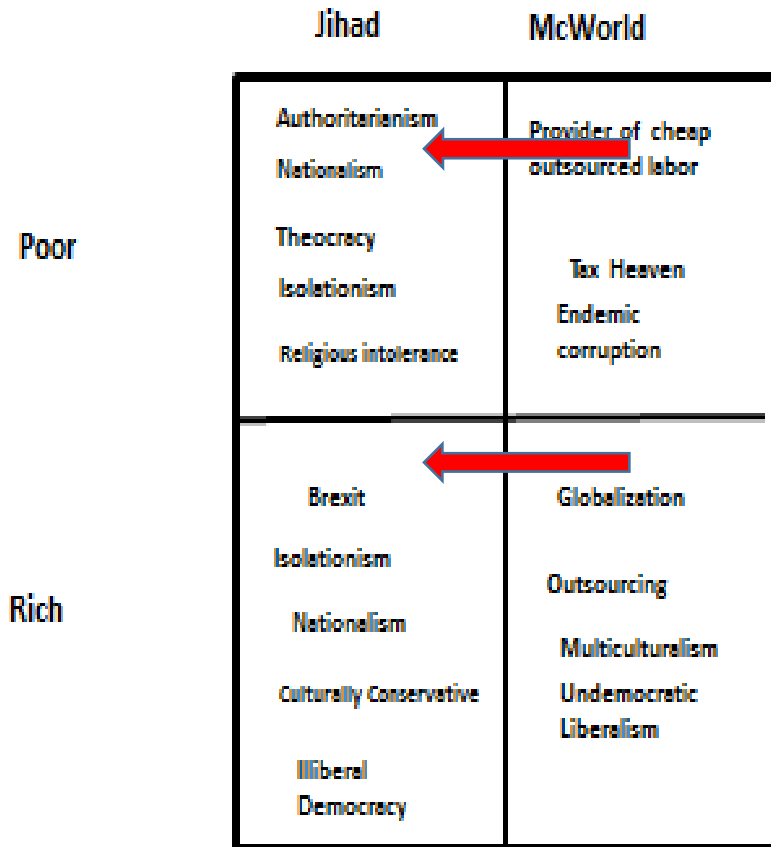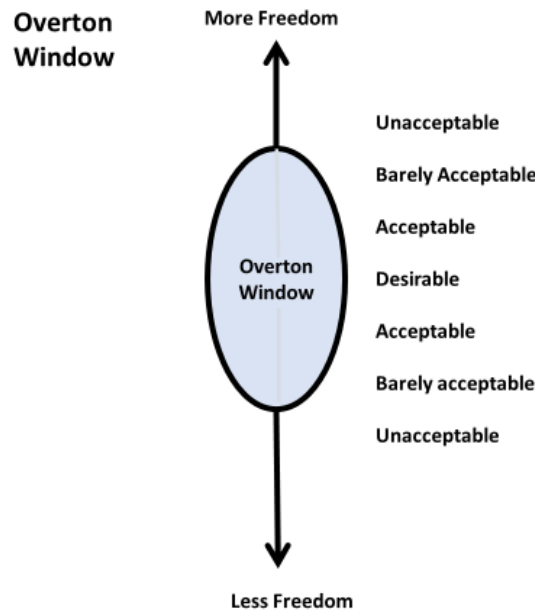|	Jihad	McWorld
Poor	Authoritarianism Nationalism Theocracy Isolationism Religious intolerance	Provider of cheap outsourced labor Tax Heaven Endemic corruption
Rich	Brexit Isolationism Nationalism Culturally Conservative Illiberal Democracy	Globalization Outsourcing Multiculturalism Undemocratic Liberalism

Figure 1: The effects of Jihad and McWorld on poor and rich countries (From Dan, 2017)

When a society slides deeper into right wing populism, the range of acceptable social behaviors and overtly displayed behaviors changes. This process can be represented by the Overton window. The window "slides" up or down, modifying the range of behaviors:

Overton Window

More Freedom

Unacceptable

Barely Acceptable

Acceptable

Overton Window

Desirable

Acceptable

Barely acceptable

Unacceptable

Less Freedom

Figure 2: The Overton Window

In previous work (Dan, 2017), I proposed the concept of a tri-dimensional Overton space, which allows for a better representation of the factors involved in repositioning the window. The degree of intolerance increases along all the axes; the position of each window depends on the degree of intolerance on each of the axes. In fact one could argue that the resurgence of racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism is the logical and unavoidable consequence of right wing populist movements demanding more and more extreme positions from their leaders. The characteristics of populism described by Mudde: authoritarianism, nativism and anti-elitism facilitate the adoption and dissemination of discriminatory ideas. This is a representation of the Overton window for racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism. The degree of prejudice increases along all the axes; the position of each window depends on the degree of specific prejudice on each axis and there is a certain degree of overlap.
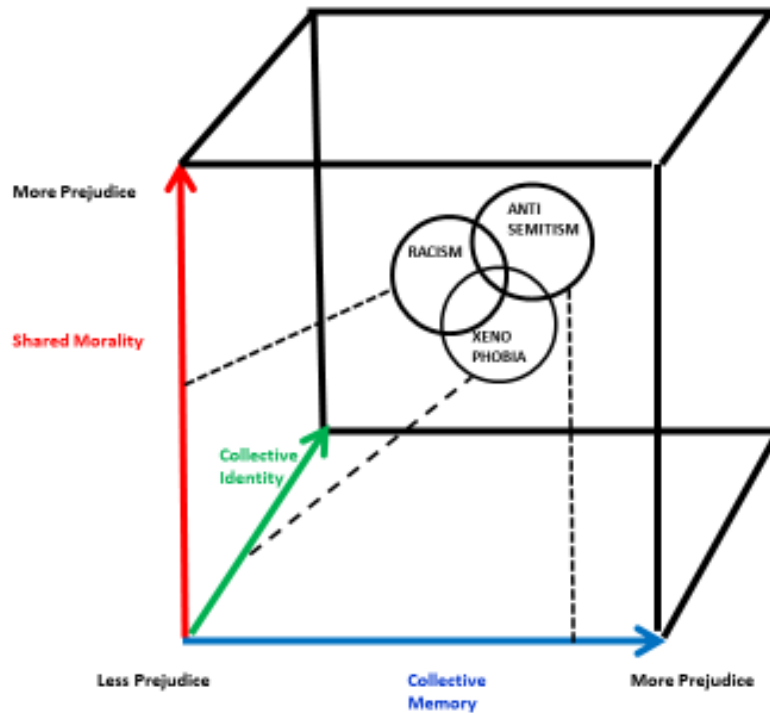
Figure 3. Intolerance in the Overton space (from Dan, 2017)

Of the three axes, namely Collective Identity, Collective Memory and Collective (shared) Morality, the first two are the ones easier to manipulate.

Manipulating the Collective Identity and Collective Memory

We evolved in small groups of hunter-gatherers and eusociality (Wilson 2012) is the key of our evolutionary success. The necessary social cohesion within the group was enhanced by the emergence of a common frame of reference whose role is to enhance group cohesion. This took place simultaneously with the development of structures in the frontal cortex which control and regulate social behavior. In turn, this made possible the emergence of proto-morality – a set of rules promoting the altruistic behaviors which foster group survival- which was internalized by the members of the group. The emergence of collective identity is a consequence of belonging to the same shared frame of reference, which would later evolve into an overarching universe of meaning, the symbolic universe (Berger and Luckman, 1966)

Redfield (1953) identified two of the essential dichotomies by which we structure our world: "Me/Non Me" and "We/They." The individual sense of identity is the decision criterion for the first dichotomy. The group identity is the criterion for the second one.

One of the paradoxes of individual identity is that it is an integrated conglomerate of a multitude of shared collective identities. This quality is similar to recursiveness in linguistics: one can identify as a Romanian of Greek Orthodox religious affiliation, who is Transylvanian, living in Bucharest, speaker of French, a theater lover, who is a fan of a given soccer team and loves red wine etc. In turn, collective identity is an integrated conglomerate of a multitude of shared individual identities. Both types on identity share a kaleidoscopic quality: depending on the situation, any of these collective or individual identities may be perceived as the salient one. As Todorov (2004, 2010) writes: "Individual identity stems from the encounter of multiple collective identities within one and the same person; each of our various affiliations contributes to the formation of the unique creature that we are. Human beings are not all similar, or entirely different; they are all plural within themselves, and share their constitutive traits with very varied groups, combining them in an individual way. Individual identity results from the interweaving of several collective identities" I believe that Todorov is correct and that he described an intrapsychic structure with a very special property: the individual and social elements are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate them. The purpose of this type of structure is to provide the connection between the individual and group levels, and to ensure its continuity. We can find this type of structure in individual and collective identity, in collective memory and in morality. At the individual level, collective identity, be it group, ethnic, religious, ideological or national (or combinations of the above) is part of individual identity. Conversely, at the group level, collective identity is a conglomerate of individual identities.

Populism changes collective memory, using memes to modify the belief systems and stereotypes which underlie the shared value system, taking advantage of our strong innate need for self-validation and our desire to avoid cognitive dissonance. Historically one could differentiate between two dynamics of populism: in the West- disaffected middle class, post-industrial desertification (Guilluy, 2014), desperation vote (Monnat, 2016), hopelessness and isolationism; in Eastern Europe: nationalism, fragmentation, anti-EU illiberalism, authoritarianism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, the return of repressed fascistic content and paranoid mindset. As the worldwide tendency is the shift towards Jihad, the two dynamics seem to be converging. There are several factors which constitute threats to identity: the massive influx of refugees and illegal immigrants, the "post-industrial desertification" (Guilluy, 2014) which lead to the decay and marginalization of vast industrial areas, the perceived attack on conventional morality and ethics, the failed effort to substitute an ersatz "European Identity" and/or "multicultural identity" to a national, ethnic or cultural identity perceived to be under siege. This later effort failed spectacularly because it overlooked the importance of the "nation state" What seems to be different in the latest outbreak of populism is not only the overlap of nationalist and economic triggers, but the fact that the catalyst seems to be the crisis of identity. The refugee crisis has become a global phenomenon, from Australia and New Zealand to Norway. The majority of refugees (except for the US) are Muslim, raising fears of irreversible cultural changes and reviving the specter of "replacement"

As Michta (2017) notes, the decline of Western values is not due to the rise of an alternative civilization or to economic decline, but to" a failure to reach consensus on shared goals and interests." He writes: "The problem, rather, is the West's growing inability to agree on how it should be defined as a civilization. At the core of the deepening dysfunction in the West is the self-induced deconstruction of Western culture and, with it, the glue that for two centuries

kept Europe and the United States at the center of the international system. The nation-state has been arguably the most enduring and successful idea that Western culture has produced. It offers a recipe to achieve security, economic growth, and individual freedom at levels unmatched in human history. This concept of a historically anchored and territorially defined national homeland, having absorbed the principles of liberal democracy, the right to private property and liberty bound by the rule of law, has been the core building block of the West's global success" In other words, the present identity crisis is similar to an auto-immune disease: Pan-European, transnational, multicultural identity proved to be no substitute for national identity and it did not fit any collective memory or identity narrative. Furthermore, the perceived attack on traditional moral and cultural values fostered a siege mentality. The commonality of issues resulted in a commonality of political decisions. For example Guilluy (2014) demonstrates the overlap between belonging to "peripheral France" and the tendency to vote for the Front National. He developed a "social fragility" index including high unemployment, poor education, poverty and single parent families. Using maps, he showed how the areas of high social fragility overlap with the vote for the right wing populist Front National. However, there is also considerable overlap between the density of immigranr population and the vote for FN:
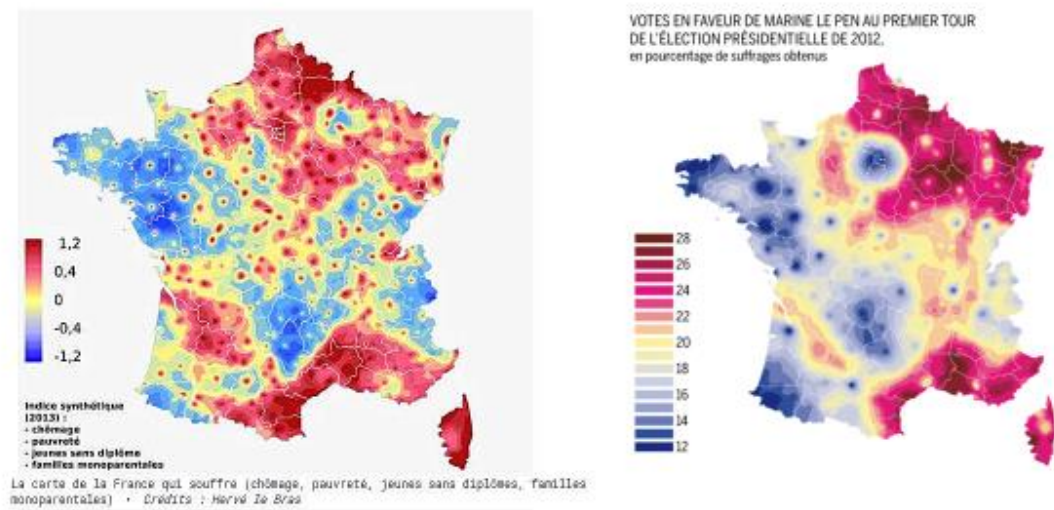

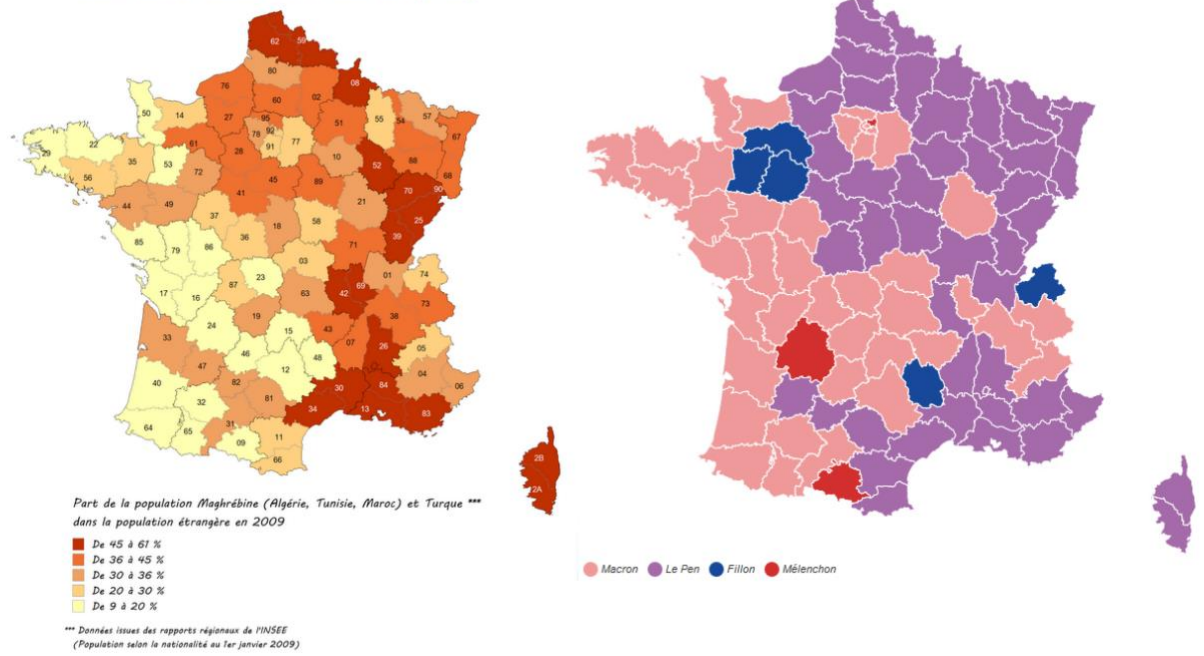Figure 4: Social fragility and FN vote

Figure 5: Immigrant population density and FN vote

A relatively similar dynamic can be seen in the Brexit vote, where rural areas and small towns voted for Brexit, while cities voted to remain. The future separatist plans of Scotland and the desire for an united Ireland also played a role in the outcome.

Brexit Vote Exposes Divide Within the United Kingdom

EU Referendum Voting Map, by Locality

Should the United Kingdom Remain or Leave the European Union?

Over 30 Million Votes
Turnout: 72%

Scotland voted strongly in favor of remaining in the European Union. While a majority of Scotland's population voted to remain a part of the United Kingdom in late 2014, many believe a second referendum will be brought forward soon concerning Scotland's participation in both the EU and the UK.

England and Wales voted strongly in favor of leaving the European Union. The "Leave" campaign resonated well with working-class voters and voters from areas experiencing particularly high amounts of immigration.

Northern Ireland voted in favor of remaining in the European Union.. While the vote in the region was close, the result has left several politicians open to the idea of a singular, united Ireland which would require Northern Ireland to leave the United Kingdom.

Scotland
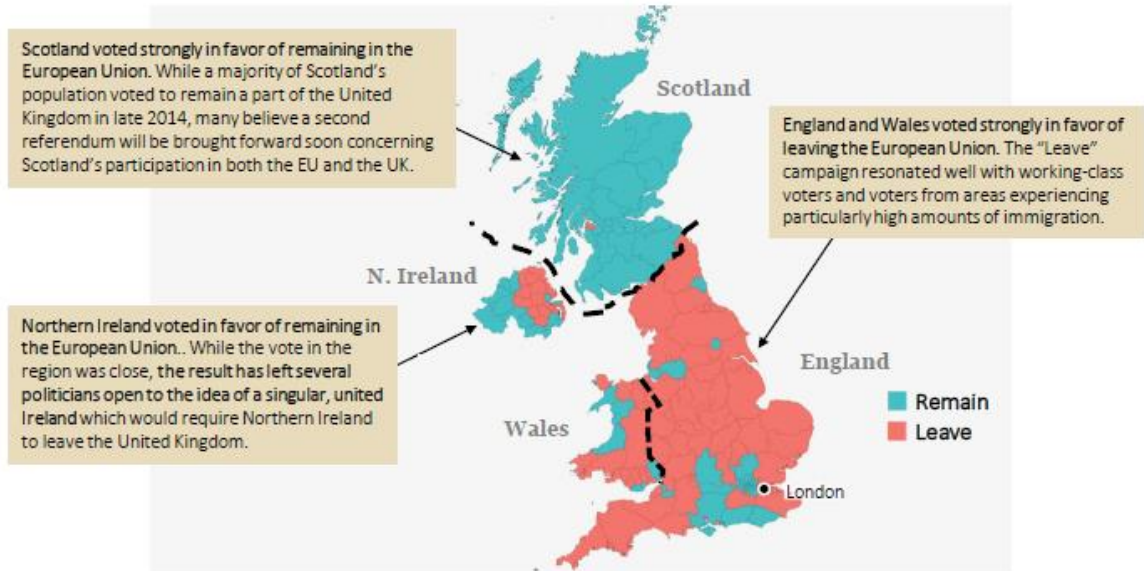N. Ireland
England
Wales
London

Remain
Leave

Figure 5: The geographical distribution of the Brexit vote.()

In the US Monnat (2016) demonstrates a similar tendency to vote for Trump in areas devastated by postindustrial desertification. She created a dataset of 3106 rural counties and found that counties with a majority white population with higher mortality rate caused by drugs, alcohol and suicide were more likely to have voted for Trump. She considers these "deaths by despair" a measure of "hopelessness, depression, despair and anxiety." When they were combined with a composite index of "economic distress" it became evident that the communities represented by these voters have been devastated by the loss of good paying manufacturing or mining jobs and that they felt marginalized, abandoned and betrayed by the system.

FIGURE 1. TRUMP OVERPERFORMANCE, BY DRUG, ALCOHOL AND SUICIDE MORTALITY RATE QUARTILE

Data Sources: Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections; U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
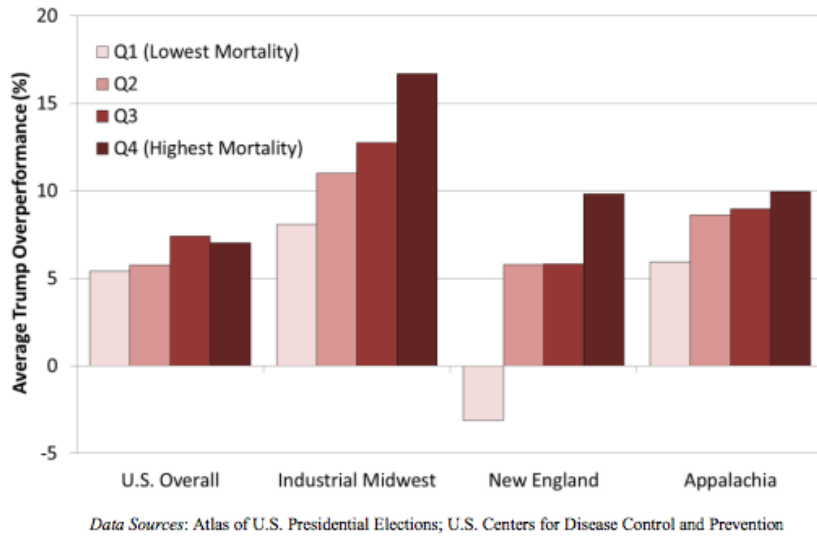
Figure 7. The pro-Trump desperation vote (Monnat, 2016) 27

The commonality between these groups of voters is a feeling of alienation and disenfranchisement. The catalyst in each cases illustrated above is the perceived threat of being replaced by a group which is ethnically, culturally and religiously different. As Guilluy says "no one wants to become a minority." In many instances, the influx of refugees or immigrants is being described as an "invasion." However, this is an imaginary danger. In fact, the resentment against refugees (and refusal to accept them) is strongest in countries that accepted the lowest number of refugees. In other words the fear of replacement and of cultural contamination is most intense where it is least likely to happen.

Refugees accepted by population

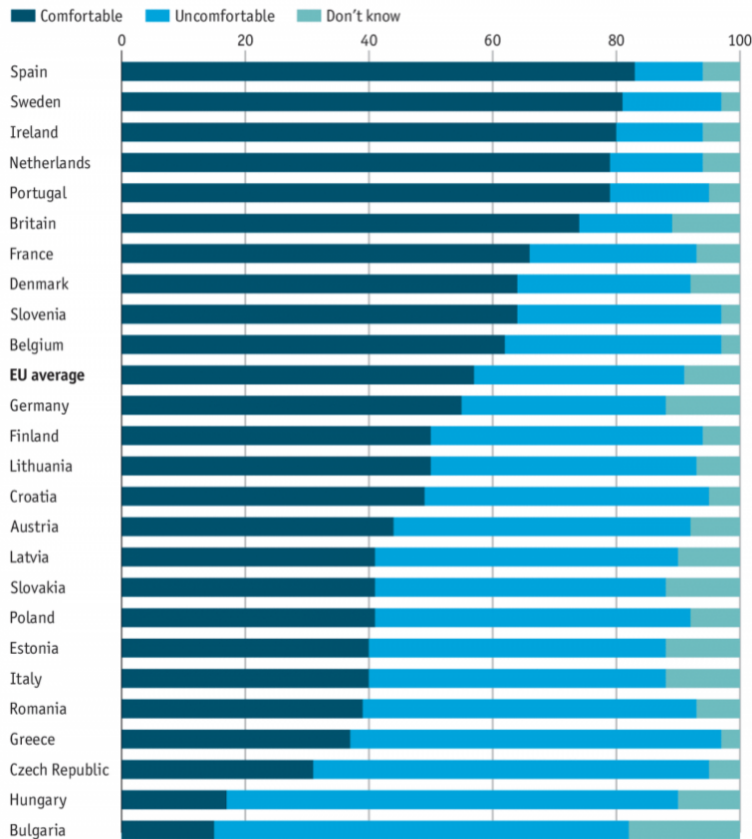Number of accepted asylum applications in EU countries, per 1,000 of population, 2015
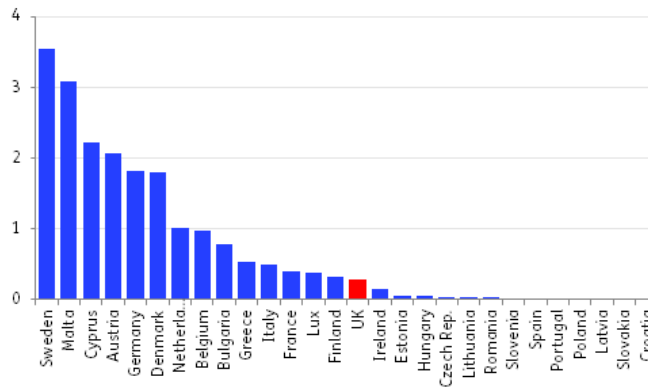
Comfort zones

"Do you feel comfortable or uncomfortable in social interactions with immigrants", % responding

■ Comfortable ■ Uncomfortable ■ Don't know

Source: European Commission

Economist.com

The increase in racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism in countries undergoing right wing populist movements are not isolated events but part of a common trend. It is not so much a set of beliefs but an emerging ideology, a common worldview.

Neuropsychological research suggests that ideology is processed by the brain in a manner similar to religion. In turn imaging studies (Harris, 2006, 2009) support the linkage between religion and identity indicating that "religious thinking is more associated with brain regions that govern emotion, self-representation and cognitive conflict in both believers and nonbelievers, while thinking about ordinary facts is more reliant upon memory retrieval networks." In other words, one's religion and ideology are a significant component of one's identity, but they are not directly related to problem solving. Taking advantage of the ubiquity of the Internet this ideology had spread globally. The paradox is that all these nativist and isolationist parties who should avoid foreign contacts share it. We could name it "universal paranoid isolationism." Brenton Tarrant, the Australian terrorist who attacked praying Muslims in a New Zealand mosque quoted Norwegian terrorist Breivik's manifesto. U.S. Coast Guard Lieutenant Christopher Hasson charged with planning a mass-casualty attack also quoted Breivik. Robert Bowers, the terrorist who killed 11 Jews praying in a Pittsburg synagogue, cited "white genocide" as his motivation, accusing the Jews of bringing in "invaders in that kill our people." White supremacist Dylann Roof murdered nine black worshipers in a Charleston church in order to start a race war. Tarrant expressed a similar motive. The Neo Nazis marching in Charlottesville chanted "Jews will not replace us" touching on a narrative running through all of the above examples.

According to Lifton (1989) threats to identity lead to a state of mind he called "totalism" characterized by rigid conformism, the amplification of between group differences, the search for scapegoats and a fear of social change. The language of the totalist environment is characterized by the thought-terminating cliché. "The most far-reaching and complex of human problems are compressed into brief, highly reductive, definitive-sounding phrases, easily memorized and easily expressed. These become the start and finish of any ideological analysis." (Lifton, 1989) The "invasion" by outsiders who will "replace us" and the "destruction of our culture" by them are such thought stopping clichés. The common ground between places as distant and different as Norway and New Zealand, prove the globalization of the conflict. The two vectors facilitating it are white supremacist ideology and the access to the social media.

As Dasgupta (2018) argues, the populist revolution does not stop with the restauration of the nation state, but causes continuing fragmentation and tribalization. The fact that we live in post-truth societies greatly facilitates the dissemination of the populist right's message. Post truth society is an almost fact free environment. In the absence of a criterion for truth, there is no moral penalty for lying. One of the effects is the defusing on the mechanisms that inhibit social behavior, namely shame and guilt. Widespread shamelessness allows for the open proclaiming of blatant untruth. "Plausible deniability" – a strategy beloved to mendacious politicians- has been replaced by "implausible deniability", as for example when the Polish government tries to deny the historical facts about the Polish participation in the Holocaust, pro-Brexit politicians deny having lied about the consequences of Brexit despite videotape evidence, or President Trump denies saying what everyone just heard him say.   What matters is succeeding in imposing a version of the truth based on wish fulfillment and emotional satisfaction rather than rigorous fact checking. Substituting the truth with the latter is at the core of understanding the dynamics and the ideological distortions of the public discourse in a post truth society. The massive use of fake news and provocative targeted messages through the social media platforms allowed people to pick and choose their version of the truth consistent with their belief system, to the point that people have difficulty distinguishing between competing versions of the truth. For example, a study by the PEW Research Center indicates that the majority of the American public has difficulty distinguishing between fake news and authentic news (Barthel, Mitchell and Holcomb, Dec 15 2016)

Majority say fake news has left Americans confused about basic facts

% of U.S. adults who say completely made-up news has caused ____ about the basic facts of current events

A great deal of confusion	Some confusion	Not much / no confusion
64%	24	11

Source: Survey conducted Dec. 1-4, 2016.
"Many Americans Believe Fake News Is Sowing Confusion"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Several other mechanisms contribute to the crystallization of a self-consistent alternative worldview: narrative framing, the filter bubble, willful ignorance and our innate tendency to seek confirmation rather than accept new facts.

Kahan, Jenkins-Smith and Braham (2010) in their discussion of "Cultural Cognition" have identified the process of "narrative framing": "Individuals tend to assimilate information by fitting it to preexisting narrative templates or schemes that invest the information with meaning.

The elements of these narrative templates—the identity of the stock heroes and villains, the nature of their dramatic struggles, and the moral stakes of their engagement with one another—vary in identifiable and recurring ways across cultural groups." This means that once one has accepted the premises of populist ideology, a permanent narrative framing bias will distort the way new facts are integrated, force-fitting them into the existing storylines. Coman, Stone et al. (2014) have shown that trying to justify atrocities committed in war alters the memories of those who committed them. "What we learn from this research is that moral disengagement strategies are fundamentally altering our memories…More specifically, these strategies affect the degree to which our memories are influenced by the conversations we have with one another." Coman, Momennejad et al (2016) also found that those sharing memories of an event tend to synchronize them. Since collective memory is shared, this means that it tends to become more and more self-consistent.

A new factor in the spread of populist ideology is the widespread use of social media. Pariser (2011) defined the "filter bubble": a personalized web search algorithm which exposes the user only to information consistent with the previous search history. Intended to gather data about the user for commercial purposes, the unintended consequence is that it "closes us off to new ideas, subjects, and important information" and "creates the impression that our narrow self-interest is all that exists" In Pariser's view this makes people more vulnerable to "propaganda and manipulation… A world constructed from the familiar is a world in which there's nothing to learn ... (since there is) invisible auto-propaganda, indoctrinating us with our own ideas."

In the case of individual identity, information that is discrepant with the narrative of the self is rejected or repressed. In the case of collective memory repression takes the form of willful ignorance, "ignorance as an active construct" (Proctor, 2008), ignorance "made, maintained and manipulated… (so) that certain people don't want you to know certain things, or will actively work to organize doubt or uncertainty or misinformation to help maintain (your) ignorance. They know and may or may not want you to know they know." The effect is the relegation of questionable issues outside the public sphere, so they cannot be debated. Discrepant information that challenges the conventional truth is met with anger and aggression.

Westen et. al (2006), using neuroimaging, compared, the functioning of subjects asked to make a decision after being confronted with facts contrary to their political beliefs, and concluded that they manipulated the data in order to get a confirmation of their pre-existing beliefs rather than analyzing the facts. This means that we are trying to confirm our biases both at individual and at group level, rather than examining countervailing arguments. Westen (2008) has also shown that political thought is almost entirely dominated by emotions. In the absence of clear criteria, people chose the version of truth that corresponded more with their pre-existing beliefs, which they found more satisfying.

Collective identity, be it group, ethnic, religious, ideological or national (or combinations of the above) is part of individual identity. Morality, by definition, shapes interpersonal behavior, first by creating an internalized moral code that is culturally defined, and second by providing the basis for supervision and feedback by others in the community. In turn, the norms and values

shared by the community shape the public sphere and determine which topics can be discussed within it. Todorov (2004) described collective memory as "not a memory per se, but a discourse that takes place in the public sphere, which reflects the self-image that a society or a group within the society tries to project." (Author's translation) Collective memory is a consensual convention which allows for the integration of recalled events in a manner consistent with the existing narrative and the rejection of events not consistent with it. The same cognitive distortion mechanisms are used at individual and collective levels. Taken together these strategies facilitate the construction of a false but coherent version of past events, which is then used to interpret and integrate present events.

My belief is that once formed, such a worldview is fixed and practically irreversible. Halbwachs (1980, (1950)) emphasized "the illusion" of the continuity of the collective identity and/or memory, which provides a narrative of a shared past that the group accepts as his own. The key element is not verifiability but belief. As Hoffer (2016, (1951)) observed "The effectiveness of a doctrine does not come from its meaning but from its certitude. ... It is obvious, therefore, that in order to be effective, a doctrine must not be understood, but has rather to be believed in."

It should be noted that the worldwide right wing populist movement has no defined center and no single leader. The development of an ideological framework that is accessible worldwide via the Internet, the development of a shared narrative regarding the perceived danger of refugees and immigrants distributed via the social media, the advent of the post-truth society have created the conditions for the emergence of a phenomenon belonging to the category of self-organizing complexity. In the absence of a centralized decision making authority and with an ability to access a diffuse, global, belief system, individuals can act in a coordinated matter without a common agreement to do so. Breivik, Tarrant, Bowers, Roof acted as the result of spontaneously emerging self-organization process. They seem to have acquired a hive like mentality and acted in a similar fashion, like the soldiers of an ant colony repelling intruders. They see their behavior as justified because of what Milgram (1974) calls "agentic state", which is a loss of autonomy and occurs when "a self -regulating entity is internally modified so as to allow its functioning within a system of hierarchical control. From a subjective standpoint, a person is in a state of agency when he defines himself in a social situation in a manner that renders him open to regulation" by his devotion to other persons on to a cause. (p. 134)

While this type of behavior is common at the level of a group or of a nation, in this cases we are dealing with a world-wide phenomenon, decentralized and sustained by a diffuse information sharing network.

According to Mussair, Garnier and Theraulaz &Helbing (2009) a self-organized process relies on four basic elements: a positive amplifying feedback loop; an inhibiting negative feedback which prevents the system from auto-destructing, the presence of fluctuations which trigger the event and "multiple direct or indirect interactions among individuals to produce a higher-level, aggregate outcome." The first condition is satisfied by the coordination of messages between Breivik, Tarrant and Roof, as well as by Tarrant and Hanson citing Breivik's manifesto. The second, inhibiting condition is satisfied because despite the terrorists' hopes none of acts was amplified into mass action. They failed to provoke a race war or a war about gun ownership. The necessary presence of triggering fluctuations can be seen in the weakening of the attachment

to democratic values and the shift from McWorld to Jihad. Finally, the Internet and social media provided the opportunity for interaction.

This set of initial conditions, namely a perceived existential threat (extinction or replacement), a vague, transcendental goal offering symbolic immortality (Becker,1976) for example "the survival of the white race or culture" are very similar to those Dan (2007) identified as necessary components for the emergence of a psychology of Evil, justifying acts extreme violence against the source of the imaginary threat as acts of heroic sacrifice.

A more striking example of "swarm intelligence", of people moving in a synchronized manner, like a school of fish suddenly changing direction, is the emergence of the "yellow vests" protest movement. The catalyst for this movement is the anger and alienation of the previously middle class and lower middle class citizens who live in the "peripheral France." It was started by a change.org petition by Priscilla Ludoski, a business woman, and Eric Drouet, a truck driver, seeking to rescind recently announced fuel price increases. At the same time, in an unrelated event, a post on Facebook asked people to block roads in protest. The first demonstration of people wearing the iconic yellow vest took place on November 17th followed by 18 "acts"- demonstrations of differing degree of violence- in major cities. The movement is leaderless, diffuse and amorphous, and communicates via social media. The yellow jackets have resisted efforts by both left and right political parties to co-opt it. It appears to be a spontaneously arising protest movement from the rural areas and the areas devastated by postindustrial desertification, fueled by a shared feeling of alienation, impoverishment and disenfranchisement.

Economist Jean Pisani-Ferry argued in Le Monde in that the cause of the conflict is the collapse of 20th Century ideological systems and their replacement by socioeconomic strata. "Now what's dangerous for democracy is the feeling that half of the population has been shunted aside. The absolute priority has to be to find some common ground."

The present worldwide surge in right wing populism is accompanied by a worldwide surge of antisemitism. To begin with, the power of the Holocaust to serve as a cautionary tale has significantly diminished. As The New York Times April 14, 2018 article suggests "the Holocaust is fading from memory." Almost half (45%) of Americans cannot name a single concentration camp and 41% of the Millennials in the US believe that "significantly less" than 6 million Jews were killed during the Holocaust.

In fact one could argue that the current resurgence of antisemitism is the logical and unavoidable consequence of right wing populism. As stated before, I believe that populism creates essentially unstable societies in which the leaders can maintain their control only by exacerbating anti-establishment, nativist and isolationist tendencies inherent in the movement. One could call this trend "populist fundamentalism" (thanks to Dr. Vasile Morar for the suggestion.) This is achieved by modifying the collective memory by creating a false narrative that the nation is under threat. As Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon et al. (1990) found, in condition of perceived threat, Christian subjects tended to evaluate Jews more negatively, and tended to evaluate those who held a similar worldview more positively, while at the same time seeing those who disagreed more negatively. Hahl, Kim and Sivan (2018) have shown, that when groups suffer from a "crisis of legitimacy" they tend to see blatant violations of the truth as a proof of authenticity and become emotionality invested in those seen as supporting them.

The resurgence of anti-Semitism has led to a re-writing of different nations' participation in the Holocaust and the reinterpretation of the respective nations' fascist past. It has also led to a worldwide outbreak of anti-Semitic incidents, unfortunately too numerous to enumerate here because they have become a daily occurrence.

In Hungary, the obsession with George Soros' influence has reached levels of paranoia which seem to come right out of George Orwell's 1984. The Orban government uses Soros as a straw man, a stand in for the world-wide Jewish conspiracy, and by extension, an excuse for its raw antisemitism. It also uses the Soros connection to attack the Central European University, a rare beacon of freedom in an increasingly authoritarian Hungary. As Mudde (2017) has noted, Orban's provocations may force the European Union to finally take action. As it stands, the infection is spreading and other countries, for example Poland and Romania are involved in actively trying to re-write their past. There are many mechanisms that enforce conformity with the collective memory of the group. The most general of those is what the citizens of Athens called "me mnesikakein," an oath not to remember past wrongdoing. For a modern version see Spain's "pacto de olividado" regarding the Civil War.

In Romania there is a tendency to deny Romanian participation in the Holocaust despite ample historical proof. Typically the discovery of sites where Jews were massacred, with the forensic evidence indicating that they were murdered by Romanian army units is countered by bringing up the crimes of Communism as an ex post facto counterargument. Periodically there are also efforts to rehabilitate the memory of the leaders of the Romanian Iron Guard and/or dedicate monuments to Marshall Antonescu. The present populist president of the Chamber of Deputies, Dragnea whose party already controls the legislature and the executive is trying very hard to take control of the judiciary.

Poland has recently adopted a law making the attribution of responsibility to the Polish nation or state for complicity during the Holocaust a crime. This overlooks documented massacres such as Jedbawne or the work of Polish/Canadian historian Grabowski (2013) which attributed to Poles responsibility for the deaths of at least 200,000 Jews. Recently (April 4, 2018) prominent Polish politician Plotkowski, leader of the "Poland Together" party of the Prime minister tweeted that "Jews are not human, they are animals." In a sign of the globalization of the conflict, on Sunday April 7th 2019 a large group of Polish nationalists demonstrated in downtown Manhattan, protesting U.S. legislation that seeks to compensate Holocaust survivors whose property was seized during World War II. Some of the demonstrators were carrying placards stating " Stop Holocaust Industry" and waving dollar bills in the faces of Jewish counter protestants.

In England, after right wing populist movement led to Brexit, there was an explosion of antisemitism in the left leaning Labor party. The de-facto leader, Jeremy Corbin, as well as Labor members of the House of Commons made blatantly antisemitic statements, thinly disguised as criticisms of Israel, followed by utterly unconvincing apologies. This only proves that the disinhibition of racist, xenophobic and nationalistic attitudes brought forth by populism find fertile ground in both left leaning and right leaning ideologies. Recent antisemitic statements by US representatives belonging to the " progressive " wing of the Democratic Party show that antisemitism is fast becoming part of the leftist ideology.

The characteristics of populism described by Mudde facilitate the adoption and dissemination of anti-Semitic ideas. Foreigners, Jews and refugees have become convenient scapegoats, and, as the nations slide towards authoritarianism, are less and less protected by law. In addition, in several of the countries quoted above, the party in power introduced legislation which makes it more difficult to replace it, succeeding, as Oriana Fallacci wrote, in "defeating democracy with democracy." This makes the possibility to reverse the process by democratic means more difficult.

I usually end papers by trying to predict future developments, and I was fully prepared to end on a pessimistic note. However, as I was putting on the finishing touches, there was a presidential election in Slovakia and the freshly elected president, Zuzana Caputova, declared to the BBC on April 10, 2019. "Populism is not the only way to resolve frustrations, or crises or a loss of trust in politicians… A constructive tone and more positive emotions - and not working with fear or threats; these are far more effective, and hold out much more hope,"

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