

Rethinking State Theories for the “Deconsolidation of Democracy”: The Rise of Pluralist Plutocracies?

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Abstract: Political practices in late modern, post-industrial, globalized capitalism are moving into distinctive new forms, in what has been called the “deconsolidation of democracy”. Colin Crouch speaks of “post-democracy” – no longer quite democratic and not authoritarian, though tending in such directions in some cases. The trends of increased political and economic polarization, declining political trust and engagement and rise of populism, nativism, illiberal and authoritarian ideas may be a response to trends in globalization, which leave a substantial portion of the population unsatisfied with political choices and outcomes. Biases in governance privileging wealth domestically and transnationally arguably underlie much of this popular disaffection and can be said to be promoting the “deconsolidation” of democracy. This essay will revisit state theories, to suggest reformulations to acknowledge the decrease in democratic accountability and increased responsiveness to plurinational plutocratic elites in the neoliberal global order. A reconceptualization is required to understand why public policy serves the interests of the few over the many, the externally-linked over the local; to explain why the state privileges transnational and overseas interests over opportunity for citizens.

The author will propose a framework for assessing these trends in systems which have become “pluralistic plutocracies” – competitive to a degree but privileging the interests of wealth above those of citizens. The essay will focus on a theoretical critique and present a potential framework for understanding the polarization in pluralist plutocracies between inclusive and exclusive, plutocratic and populist political tendencies. It will suggest areas of future empirical research required to elucidate the nature of plutocratic governance, focused on transnational economic and trade agreements, social formations and ideational apparatuses which deepen integration and liberalization across increased areas of public policy and restrain and reshape the character of democratic governance. The conceptualization will permit examination of the rise of populist backlash in such systems whose plutocratic character have eroded public confidence and legitimacy. It will use the example of trade policy under Trump to evaluate the limited prospects for populism to deviate substantially from plutocratic goals and interests as right populism is in practice faux populism. It remains a working conceptual paper with empirical work required.

Introduction

Democracy is dead! Long live plutocracy!

Such an announcement is premature, but not necessarily excessively so. An examination of the character of the contemporary state, indicates that, far from shrinking in the face of the constraints of globalization, state power is increasingly exercised in the service of a transnational plutocracy, increasingly stateless and multi-cultural in character, which wields immense power to shape state policy

and transnational institutions to suit its purposes at the expense of the majority of citizens. The plutocracy is determined partially by structural position as the strata capable of most wealth accumulation (the 1% in the current vernacular) but also consciously defines itself as transnationally mobile and multicultural segments in contrast with the majorities in all the diverse states and societies from this it is drawn. In other words, the reality of being in a structural position to engage in wealth accumulation is accompanied by self-identification based on assumptions of deserving qualities like achievement, mobility and superiority which provide ideological justification for individual affluence in contrast with surrounding poverty. This plutocratic strata, both acting consciously and exerting constraints structurally, channels its demands through transnational accords which limit state discretion and flexibility; but it also employs states structures, often against most citizen's interests, to serve its purposes in new ways (global concentration of finance and other forms of capital, intellectual property enforcement, law and order agendas, opaque border controls, surveillance and kettling of dissent and too big to fail bailouts). For many of these actors, self-identification of US versus THEM is decreasingly focused on national boundaries and on resisting challenges from less wealthy actors, domestic and foreign and excluding even shareholders from the insider grouping in favour of CEO forums and related think tank and media centres.

In its interests, this transnational plutocracy is in fact reviving the power and importance of states which were once seen to be attenuating under pressures of globalization. Indeed, the pace of accumulation of power by government over the citizenry in some areas is astonishing, to the point that most people's behaviours could be regarded as 'criminal' (in anti-piracy or anti-soft-drug legislation for instance) in the interests of a diminishing number of global corporate entities. Far from withering away, states are increasingly constraining citizen's behaviours in pursuit of some legitimate ends (anti-terror, online predators) but manipulated symbolically to encourage acceptance of increasingly unfettered state authority (such as online monitoring, intercepts etc.). While transnational accords and new regional groupings push forward measures of legislative convergence in regulatory and policy realms to facilitate transnational economic integration, a simultaneous expansion in state authority is directly focused on facilitating wealth creation for the plutocracy in the name of business-friendly environments, even where clear restraints on freedom are involved. A notable example involves increased patent and intellectual property protection at the expense of market competition and access to vital technologies and medicines. (Murray, 2006; Brown 2010, 52).

A reconceptualization is required to encapsulate how the state has not atrophied but rather gained new powers and commanded new resources, which are not deployed in the interests of the majority of citizens. The plurinational link is required to understand why the state privileges tax breaks invested overseas over sound programs promoting opportunity at home; or mobility for the well-connected, over opportunity for most citizens; how increasingly public policy serves the interests of the few over the many, the externally-linked over the local. As the tax cuts and bailouts of recent years illustrate, everywhere those who force risk on all assume no risk for themselves and indeed use states to profit handsomely even in the face of their gross negligence or criminal mendacity. Citizens die to protect corporate profits and patents in medicines and other necessities; people starve so corporate control of food or water supplies can grow apace.

As will be argued below, political practices in late modern, post-industrial globalized capitalism are moving into distinctive new forms; no longer quite democracy and not yet fully authoritarian, though possibly tending in such directions. This author proposes a conception of pluralist plutocracy to

encapsulate states where electoral competition persists, but governments of all stripes adhere to the interests of plutocracy. Yet the phenomenon of populist backlash which has gained prominence recently reflects growing popular disenchantment with this plutocratic consensus. This essay will briefly examine the example of US trade policy after Trump to explore the limited extent to which such populism will generate real deviation from the plutocratic agenda at least in the economic realm, though evidently presaging important policy changes on social and cultural matters. (Finbow, 2017).

Post democracy in the new millennium?

Colin Crouch has outlined the “post-democratic” situation in post-industrial societies like the United Kingdom, marked by the closer approximation of New Labour to Thatcherism. He portrays the evolution from the heady early years of democratic practice to that found in late-modern states in recent times:

The high level of widespread political involvement of the early [post-war] years ... could not be sustained for many years. Elites soon learned how to manage and manipulate. People became disillusioned, bored or preoccupied with the business of everyday life. The growing complexity of issues after the major initial achievements of reform made it increasingly difficult to take up informed positions, to make intelligent comment, or even to know what ‘side’ one was on. Participation in political organizations declined almost everywhere, and eventually even the minimal act of voting was beset by apathy. (Crouch 2000, 5).

Crouch describes the parabolic course from pre-democracy, through its height, to a situation of post-democracy which retains some of democracy’s characteristics, but has reverted sufficiently to pre-democratic practices to no longer warrant being “dignified” with the label democratic. The years of the welfare state were the apex of democratic practice in his analysis, but prompted a reaction from the plutocracy as the crisis of accumulation and legitimation of the 1970s and the transformation of technology undermined the Fordist system which sustained employment, taxation and social service in that model. As this base declined, the economic and social system transformed in ways which restricted the potential for democratic practice and popular involvement.

Increased inequality in well-being created dysfunctions; unequal and inadequate access to quality education; differential burdens of daily life in working families with less resources where multiple jobs are required to survive; one parent families where dual burdens and low income are often crippling; or even two-parent households where both work just to cover the costs of borrowing necessary to approximate what used to be a middle-class lifestyle. The continuing decline in life chances, including life expectancy, for lower middle and working class individuals is being widely recognized at present. “Only low-wage jobs that lead nowhere are being created at the bottom. The middle class is being hollowed out because manufacturing has been shifted out of the country and new digital technologies, which out-source white-collar work to consumers themselves, are replacing everyone from bank tellers to airline clerks.” (Gardels, 2013). And replacement employment is continually downgraded in benefits and wages. “90 percent of the 27 million jobs created in the US in the last 20 years have been in the low-wage “non- tradable” sectors of retail sales, health care and government service”. (Gardels, 2013).

The rise of these inequalities is important given the conventional understanding of democracy and its need to fair levels of equality to thrive. Conventional analyses of democracy indicated the need for vibrant middle class constituencies with enough social capital to participate meaningfully in public life; and for meaningful mobility and opportunity. (Lipset 1994). Crouch discusses how developments in

liberal democracy, normally seen as conjoint, has disguised the dysfunctions caused by their distinct character which earlier analysts had recognized.

Since we have become so accustomed to the joint idea of liberal democracy we tend today not to see that there are two different elements at work. Democracy requires certain rough equalities in a real capacity to affect political outcomes by all citizens. Liberalism requires free, diverse and ample opportunities to affect these outcomes. These are related and mutually dependent conditions. Maximal democracy certainly cannot flourish without strong liberalism. (Crouch 2000, 10).

But there is an essential tension, since measures to enhance political equality encroach on liberal rights which are required to permit free, diverse action to influence public life. Yet efforts in recent years to revive rights at the expense of equality has made equitable participation in public life that much more elusive.

As globalization and “free trade” projects are increasingly revealed as enhancements of privilege and flexibility for the rich at the expense of others across the globe, it is important to consider how states are exploited as a tool of this enhancement, and are revitalized according to plutocratic needs. The implications for democracy as practiced and celebrated are profound. Post cites Bobbio: “Democratic forms of government are those in which the laws are made by the same people to whom they apply (and for that reason they are autonomous norms), while in autocratic forms of government the law-makers are different from those to whom the laws are addressed (and are therefore heteronomous norms)” (Post, 2006, 25). If the laws are made not by citizens at large, but largely by and for plutocrats in most states (Gilens and Page 2014), then the legitimacy and durability of democracy become dubious and worthy of critical scrutiny by scholars. If as Crouch asserts, this post-democratic order will be durable, then scholars must enunciate a theory of the state consistent with the new drift away from democracy to an exclusivist plutocracy.

Plutocracy and democratic governance

Occasionally in times of stress or crisis, political-economic developments reveal the underlying processes which are normally opaque if not deliberately obscured. The 2008 crisis and subsequent Euro crisis provided such moments, as plutocratic ambition and transparency reached new heights. The massive bailouts to bankers who perpetrated the financial malfeasance or negligence which eroded many individuals’ careers and lives provided a strong concrete symbol of plutocratic policy dominance. The virtual complete suspension of democratic governance in Greece and Italy in 2011 and appointments of technocratic governors willing to enforce the plutocracy’s wishes at the expense of popular majorities provides another instance. This “banker’s coup” in Europe (Faris, 2011) reveals the transparent thinness of elite commitment to anything resembling democracy as these states were forced to “surrender of much economic sovereignty, putting those decisions further out of the reach of their own citizens” (Freedland, 2011). By imposing rule by unelected technocrats “this concentration of power “has suspended the normal rules of democracy, and maybe democracy itself.” (Foley, 2011). But these exceptional cases obscure the more common feature of plutocratic governance as a matter of course in seemingly competitive democratic systems.

Conventional political science continues to celebrate the virtues of “liberal democracy”. This system of governance is usually defined as system in which leaders are selected by periodic, free and fair elections,

held in a context of widespread protection of basic rights to communication, participation and dissent. States that retain much of these elements of liberal and democratic practice have distinct advantages over authoritarian or failed states. Even a minimalist conception of democracy – whereby the only significant criteria is that voters select office-holders – remains preferable to a system without such checks, where more substantial abuse, inefficiency and corruption reign. But this does not mean these systems are still providing sufficient popular input on core decisions. A closer look indicates the remarkable concentration of power across transnational and national institutions as technocratic elites rise to new heights in the political mainstream and behind the scenes. This reveals the increasingly brazen and unapologetic nature of plutocratic actions as the architects of crisis receive reward and authority in place of punishment and censure and impose all adjustment costs on the majority.

The difference between long-established democracies with “liberal” electoral and juridical systems and defective proto-democracies, or “low intensity” democracies (Gills and Rocamora 1993; Arce and Bellinger 2007) - variously labeled ‘illiberal’ (Zakaria 1997; Smith and Ziegler, 2008), ‘delegative’ (O’Donnell 1994) ‘guided’ (Brown 2001) or ‘directed’ democracies (Kratsev, 2006) - arguably is eroding over time. Accountability to transnational plutocrats as opposed to citizens is evident in many countries at national, local and intermediate levels. Political analysts usually focus on non-Western, developing or newly industrialized nations in applying such concepts (Russia and Venezuela, or other Latin American or African states) but miss the degree to which such partial conceptions of democracy come closer and closer to reality in core states. Governance in all parts of the democratic world needs to be carefully re-evaluated. McGrew notes how while “for many new democracies the aspiration and political rhetoric far exceeds the realization of effective democracy ... public disenchantment with elected politicians and the capacity of democratic governments to deal with many of the enduring problems - from inequality to pollution- confronted by modern societies suggest that all is not well within the old democracies” either. (McGrew 2002, 26). For at least a decade, American political scientists have taken note of the implications of inequalities for democracy. “Disparities of income, wealth, and access to opportunity are growing more sharply in the United States than in many other nations, and gaps between races and ethnic groups persist. Progress toward realizing American ideals of democracy may have stalled, and in some arenas reversed.” (APSA Task force, 2004, 1). Wolin has coined the term “inverted totalitarianism” (2003) to convey the concentration of power in “managed democracies” such as the American “democracy incorporated” (2010).

The basic requirement that democracy incorporate “free and fair” elections with genuine competition among political parties and office seekers can itself be questioned; elections are now very expensive and not free, evidenced by the frequency with which potential candidates withdraw for financial reasons, and the high amounts of revenue which successful candidates must raise. Liberal guarantees for rights protected by strong constitutional practice and enforced equitably under the rule of law are also stretched beyond the credible; even Supreme Court justices acknowledge the limited access for the middle class due to high legal fees, which turn many aspects of those rights into privileges. (McLachlin, 2007). Consider for instance the ability for some to use “libel chill” “to dissuade others from making any challenges to their behaviours or claims, in a fashion which tilts legal rights to basic free speech unevenly. Voter suppression tactics focused on minority and low income voters provide another instance in which free and fair elections are increasingly questionable. Electoral practices and constitutional rights are not entirely negated but they operate far differently from standard liberal-democratic theory.

Table 1 Typologies of Political systems

System Type	Liberal Democracy	Pluralist Plutocracy	Illiberal Democracy	Competitive Authoritarian	Authoritarian
Political Rights	broad rights	rights as privileges?	limited rights	minimal rights	no rights
Electoral Process	competitive elections	electoralism	fair not free elections	unfair elections	no competitive elections
Normal Party System Type	consensus PR multi party	majoritarian two party	distorted competitive party	Dominant Party	Single Party
Sample Countries	Scandinavia, West Europe PR	Anglo Saxon FPTP	NICs	FSU	LDC Communist

Pluralistic plutocracy as a state form

This essay should be read as an effort to update state theories to acknowledge and elucidate these growing tendencies, which suggest something very different about the character of governance than might have been observed 20 years previously, when liberalization and globalization were expected to create liberating diminishment of state authority and mutually beneficial integration regionally and globally. This reflects the growing polarization of politics, especially in Anglo Saxon first-past-the-post systems. This polarization is taking place in a governance model where money and wealth command an ever-stronger presence, and democratic politics has become principally a contestation among denizens of wealth. (Stratmann, 2005). This was evidenced in the US context after Citizens United (with dark money unleashed in politics as never before) by Trump’s labelling of Hilary Clinton as the “Goldman Sachs candidate” prior to appointing many persons from this and similar firms and sectors to his own cabinet. Elsewhere, this author has referred to “pluralistic plutocracy” (Finbow, 2016) where all significant competitive political parties are dominated by wealth and tailor economic. Investment and trade policies accordingly. Where major parties and leaders divide now is largely over non-economic socio-cultural matters, reflecting contemporary diversity in race, immigration status, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, sustainability and social values issues. (Frank 2004; Kruse, 2015). The division can be seen as poles on a spectrum between inclusionary plutocrats, sometimes called globalists or cosmopolitans, associated with Davos; and exclusionary plutocrats, willing to use wedge, cultural and moral issues (gays, guns and God) to mobilized support for regressive populist movements like the US tea party and UKIP in the UK.

Some analysts may object that the orthodox, minimalist portrayal of democratic as equivalent to electoralism makes this criticism misguided, since electoral processes continue and minimal political rights are generally enforced. But insisting on a definition which approximates the etymology is justified,

since politicians consistently invoke their “mandate” from the people, and citizens still aspire to influence, though arguably the cynical are justified in their disbelief. One can argue that the residual rights guarantees and limited procedural electoral processes makes this system superior to most of its competitors, although only a limited number of states with proportional representation, mixed corporate and public media and genuine competition among a variety of parties representing a range of policy options approximate the democratic principle anymore - and even these are increasingly constrained by transnational pluralist interests. Where majority governments can be elected with small pluralities – or where two party competitions clearly constrain choice and even three parties become less meaningful choices (Finbow, 2011) – democratic accountability is increasingly marginalized. Where legislative districts are skewed to rural areas, federal institutions favour rural states in senates. or over represent less populous regions in electoral colleges, where gerrymandered districts favour one political grouping or race, and where voter suppression flourishes, then democracy is undermined.

A reformulation is required which captures this and removes the legitimizing element of the term democracy from these depictions, given the sparse attention to majority or popular wishes in actual policy making in the contemporary state. Hence, the influence of pluralistic, plurinational plutocracy in most regimes must be recognized as the core driving force of contemporary politics, though it is differentially realized depending on the particular insertion of states in global economy and new regional groupings, as well as internal configuration of legislative, executive, federal and electoral institutions, which provide differential abilities for the plutocracy to promote desirable policies. A typology of governance must also be adopted which removes expectations of popular control, which are unachievable in current conditions – a spectrum running from electoral to authoritarian political forms colours the implementation of plutocratically driven policies in particular polities. The same overarching interests of the plutocracy are served but with more or less possibility for popular input via elections, which shapes the particular pluralistic coalition representing the plutocracy in any given juncture. In the minimalist majoritarian electoralism common in the Anglo-Saxon democracies, the competition is truncated and all major competitors in two-party (and even three party) systems are beholden to the plutocracy, supportive of transnational integration, financialization and constraining economic policies or integration agreements (sometimes referred to inaccurately as “trade deals”).

By pluralistic plutocracy, the author suggests consensus on the essence of core economic policies among major parties with political division and discord focused on values of diversity, recognition and ecological sustainability, (with minor parties and failed candidacies sometimes outside that framework). A proposed typology of primary political positions, grouped as quadrants might provide a map to understanding the interplay of pluralistic governance and populism, which operates differentially in specific political systems. The author draws upon an inclusionary-exclusionary spectrum as used to describe populist movements by Mudde, based on the degree of outreach to disenfranchised and marginalized communities. The cosmopolitan-communitarian divide affects this degree of inclusion, but also the placement of winners and losers (subjectively as well as objectively) in the globalization process. Zurn and Wilder cite Calhoun: “cosmopolitanism is the class consciousness of frequent travelers” while “communitarianism is the class conscience of friends of the homeland”. (2016, 20).

Table 2 Political Groupings in Pluralist Plutocracies

Cosmopolitan- Transnational	Inclusionary Populists (progressive social democracy) Syriza Corbyn Warren Saunders Podemos Melenchon Layton	Inclusionary Plutocrats (progressive neo-liberalism) Mulcair Blair Dexter Trudeau Obama Macron Clinton Diffuses
	Exclusionary Populists (regressive populism) Farage Le Pen Orban Wilders Trump	Exclusionary Plutocrats (regressive neo-liberalism) Cameron Howard G.W. Bush May Harper Promotes
Communitarian - nationalist	Mass Based	Elite based

On another dimension, the increased inequality in wealth between elites and masses provides the social basis for a plutocratic versus populist dimension to emerge as most prominent above traditional class loyalties. This dimension also reveals differential strategies between exclusionary and inclusionary plutocrats; the former use populism as a tool to mobilize support from constituents whose interests they do not intend to really serve; the latter diffuses or opposes populism which would add a progressive economic element against plutocratic interests while still promoting social inclusion on lines of gender and ethno-racial and immigration status. This is a preliminary configuration with some suggested placements of contemporary and recent political actors which are at this point impressionistic. It will eventually require empirical verification and development, through evaluation of party platforms and leaders' statements using criteria for the delineation of exclusion-inclusion and cosmopolitan-communitarian

Plutocracy refers to the "rule of wealth" and best captures the character of the elites who currently dominate state decisions at all levels and in almost all societies; witness work this author has done at provincial (2011) and municipal (2012) levels. What unites them is a relentless drive for wealth at whatever expense to social stability, citizen adaptability to change, and hence ultimately national sovereignty and security. Wolin's conception of inverted totalitarianism captures the domestic element with "the merging of those forms of power that used to operate separately at the beginning of liberal modernity, such as religion, economics, and political authority. In inverted totalitarianism, "private" and "public," broadly speaking, tend to become symbiotic and lose their individual distinctiveness. They coalesce and give birth to a compact, organic body within which all those previously separate forms integrate and merge." (Urbinati, 2010, 172). Transnationally, social and economic connections are also rapidly evolving, "in international finance, in ethnic groups both subnational and, indeed, transnational, in the world of international communications and the media, in strategic alliances among firms, in the mindset of international investors, in transgovernmental policy networks and transnational pressure groups, and in the discourse and practices of state actors themselves" (Cerny 1997, 274).

Increasingly in recent years, corporate and professional networks have strengthened transnationally even as in many states national corporate elites have grown less robust. Elites are now linked through a myriad of corporate directorships, professional associations, think tanks and planning boards which continue to multiply especially between core regions in the global economic space. (Carroll and Sapinski, 2010). While there are some highly visible symbols of these networks in action, such as the World Economic Forum at Davos, (Graz, 2003) less visible continuous efforts are more consistently important. Evans has concisely outlined the powerful reach of this transnational nexus:

The global rules and networks currently being constructed around the interests of transnational corporations (particularly financial ones) are "hegemonic" in two ways: First, they are dominant in their ability to provide material rewards and impose sanctions (including coercion). Second, and equally important, they are ideologically dominant. They are surprisingly successful in portraying specific definitions of "free trade" and "competitiveness" as representing the general interests of all citizens, not just particular interests ...Consequently, opponents of this hegemonic system of rules and ideology are easily branded as either not understanding how the system works or as trying to pursue "special interests" at the expense of the general good. (Evans, 2000, 230).

The transnational character of the plutocracy has resulted in national divisions at the elite level, with political and economic competition between those linked to the global and those with roots in the local

or national. As Robinson writes of the developing world, “Emergent transnationally-oriented elites grounded in globalized circuits of accumulation compete with older nationally-oriented elites grounded in more protected and often state-guided national and regional circuits.” (2010, 18). The loyalty of these elites to national or local communities is rapidly evaporating, such that they pressure states for policies which are patently not in the interests of national majorities; hence the tax cut and deregulatory mantras lose no steam notwithstanding the evidence of their ineffectiveness in economic revival and the increased inequality evident in most societies in the era of globalization.

Inclusionary Plutocrats adopt a combination of neo-liberal economic policy, tempered by rhetorical (but rarely substantive) commitment to sustainability goals; but also wedded to an inclusive social framework involving protection and promotion of social movement constituencies based on racial, ethnonational and gender lines. This is sometimes referred to as “progressive neo-liberalism” (Fraser 2016). Inclusive plutocrats can be associated with a range of actors, notably “New Labour” in UK, Clinton DNC in US and Chretien-Martin-Trudeau Liberals in Canada. These leaders express a general devotion to neo-liberal transnational integration and support deregulation, privatization, social welfare reductions and especially free trade agreements. But this is coupled for such movements by a “progressive” commitment to promotion of the interests of former marginalized constituencies, including ethnic minorities and women and gender/LGBTQ+ minorities. Hence these actors pursue important policies of human rights, justice, equity and affirmative action which can be portrayed as progressive in character.

Fraser identifies this strain of “progressive neoliberalism” which features commitment to liberalized policies alongside recognition of identity group claimants driven by new social movements. In her reading, progressive neo-liberalism is a “perverse” political construct linking those marginalized constituencies with plutocrats in the creative and technological fields. This has a damaging impact on the political realm. “Progressive ideals (diversity, women’s and LGBTQ rights, multiculturalism) gloss policies that devastate manufacturing and the populations who once forged stable “middle-class” lives from engagement in it” (Fraser, 2016, 282). The ultimate effect is marginalization and mobilization of the disaffected in regressive directions, alongside increased diversity of wealth and power (albeit glacially). Inclusionary plutocrats arguably actively undermine inclusionary populist movements as in the Clinton push back against Sanders and Blairite New Labour attacks on Corbyn.

Exclusionary Plutocrats Others in the billionaire plutocratic class have had no problem associating themselves with exclusionary and nativist tropes, either as a prominent part of their core beliefs or as a political strategy (dating at least since Reconstruction) to divide working class challengers on ethnic and racial lines. Mayer has documented the wealthy conservative activists who funded the “populist” tea party movement. (2016, 178-85). Skocpol and Williamson similarly trace the role of well-funded organizations like Freedom Works and Americans for Prosperity in stimulating and supporting such populist, anti-state mobilizations. (2012, 104). Most of their concerns involve maximizing the potential for wealth production via a limited state, downsizing regulations, privatizing activities and minimizing taxes on corporations, incomes and estates of the plutocrats themselves. This takes the form of regressive neo-liberal economic politics and exclusionary social conservatism. While less prominent in the Canadian or British case, individual politicians have adopted some of this strategy to lesser effect (as in tests for “Canadian values” or establishment of a “barbaric practices hotline”).

The darker side to the exclusionary plutocrats has been their willingness to employ nationalists, nativists, misogynist and fundamentalist tropes to promote their positions. The GOPs longstanding

campaigns against gay marriage, gun control and affirmative action can be read as examples of this; with some of those weakening, the turn to trans-rights, bathroom bills and the like served as replacements. Trump was supported by such elements as the Mercers who funded and partially own Breitbart, the nationalist news site headed by Stephen Bannon, who managed Trump's campaign and used divisive cultural and gender rhetoric to sway "populist" support (Gold, 2017). But the malleability of the plutocrats and the core focus on self-interests managed to reassert itself. Even those plutocrats who openly criticized him (either given his personal flaws, or their belief that he couldn't win the presidency) eventually were willing to ally and benefit, given their basic shared interests in the limited state, deregulation and low taxation, "school choice", health care privatization and fossil energy development. (Stone, 2016).

Populism: Plutocratic dominance has led to a populist backlash in many states, which has impacted political campaigns, though not altered major areas of economic policy in most cases. Populism, per Mudde refers to an "ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people' (Mudde, 2004, 543). As a thin centered ideology based around this simple distinction, populism is subject to potential manipulation and exploitation by leaders who employ this rhetoric differentially, especially by providing inclusive or exclusive variants of the "corrupt elite" versus the "pure people". (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013, 151). These authors distinguish between inclusionary versus exclusionary populists depending on the degree of pluralism encompassed in the "pure people", with inclusionary populists extending the umbrella broadly and exclusionary populists narrowing to a select traditional definition of the people. Though they distinguish these types between Europe and Latin America, the potential for both to co-exist remains, as we can see in the Saunders appeal to the occupy generation (Gabbit, 2015), alongside the Tea party appeal in the United States. In each case, plutocratic interests appeal to the populist base with rhetorical messages which usually belie the commitment to neo-liberal policies and ideals, which serve long-run plutocratic interests domestically and transnationally.

Exclusionary Populists Analyses of the rise of right populism on both sides of the Atlantic have sometimes noted the duality of influences, economic insecurity versus cultural resentment. (Inglehart and Norris, 2016). Exclusionary populists draw on anti-cosmopolitan themes rooted in nationalist far right, racist and religious fundamentalist communities. These have been fueled recently by the rise of new technologies which allowed previously discredited and marginalized groupings to seek additional support. These social and cultural histories of racism and sexism provide fertile ground for such movements, which have also been exploited as a political strategy by the exclusionary plutocrats to steer support away from progressive alternatives and consolidate political power. As Sides et. al. note of the US campaign "Americans' political identities are increasingly driven by competing understandings of what their country is and ought to be—a multicultural society that welcomes newcomers and embraces its growing diversity, or a more provincial place that recalls an earlier era of traditional gender roles and white Christian dominance in economic and cultural life" (Sides et. al. 2017). Similar bifurcation of England into nostalgic inward and globalist outward looking constituencies based around education and life prospects seem evident in assessments of Brexit. (Jennings and Stoker, 2016).

While nativist and divisive cultural themes played a role, there is evidence that local results in the US election (Autor et. al. 2016; Kolko 2016) and the Brexit referendum (Goodwin and Heath, 2016; Dorling et. al. 2016; Hubner 2016) were affected by economic indicators which doubtless fueled attentiveness

to populist scapegoating. Social problems like drug use, decreased life expectancy and poverty also grouped in Trump districts. “In many of the counties where Trump did the best, economic precarity has been building and social and family networks have been breaking down for several decades. In these places, there are now far fewer of the manual labor jobs that once provided livable wages, health insurance, and retirement benefits to those without a college degree. Downward mobility is the new normal” making voters susceptible to “Trump’s anti-free trade message”. (Monnat, 2016, 5). Evidence of the long-term decline of life chances for a substantial portion of the population is confirmed by multiple sources. (Guvenen et. al 2017). The ongoing debate about the economic versus cultural dimensions remains unresolved, but a degree of interdependence among these factors seems evident. As Thompson (2016) concludes, “it counterproductive to keep anti-minority sentiments and economic anxiety separate” as “people tend to evaluate their status and happiness based on relative gains and losses, not absolute levels. Older non-college white men might not be desperately poor, but their economic fortunes are clearly in decline. They are watching their incomes stagnate, their children’s income fall behind, and their cultural status whither. Second, Trump is fanning their anger by scapegoating poor minorities, thus making many of his economic messages fundamentally racial’ He concludes “cultural anxiety and economic anxiety reinforce each other in ways that are invisible, yet obvious.”

Inclusionary populists include a constellation of groups who attempt to build populism around progressive social, and sometimes social democratic, precepts. Examples include Sanders and Warren in the US, Corbyn in the UK, and those continental European leftists who have emerged especially in the wake of the 2008 crisis. Sanders for instance squarely targeted the agenda of tax cuts for the wealth against a backdrop of middle class decline, increased poverty and spiraling debt. (Sanders, 2015). Grassroots mobilizations like Occupy, Black Lives Matters, fight for fifteen, Idle no More, and truth and reconciliation measures have breathed life into such oppositional movements working outside established parties and rejecting the neoliberal consensus among plutocrats. These actors do not intend to compromise equity principles based on multicultural communities, gender and sexual orientation. For instance, the Platform for the Movement for Black Lives encompasses diverse elements which seek a more authentic progressive platform, usually marginalized within the major parties, including ending the influence of money and politics, and addressing class issues as well as race, gender and sexual identity. (Platform, 2016). There is evidence of the resonance of these positions among young voters, who seem to understand the limitations of the system and to have potentially embraced a social democratic alternative based on concerns of equity, sustainability and inter-generational disparities. (Talbot, 2015).

This carries on from a tradition of emancipatory movements since at least the civil rights era, as radical critiques persist even as their prescriptions are marginalized and policy directions worsened in social and economic realms by conciliatory or coopted centrist and third way practitioners. There is strong recognition of the compromised character of such inclusionary plutocrats. “The role of Clinton’s DLC, the cozy relationship between the Democratic Party and financial capital, the increasing cultural dominance of tech elites, and the incorporation of liberal feminism and liberal multiculturalism into neoliberal politics and ideology” indicate a need to construct “a left outside the Democratic Party that brings into coalition the struggles against social oppression and a challenge to the powers of corporate capital.” (Brenner 2017). And new organizing and dissemination opportunities among new media have allowed such groups to coalesce and attempt to pressure and transform and “renew” established parties to some degree. (Chadwick and Stromer-Galley, 2016). Similar movements to revive an inclusive left have emerged in a variety of nations; witness Corbynism in the UK and Melenchen in France as recent

examples. But they have faced resistance from progressive neo-liberals who feel the globalizing trade and liberalization agenda should continue, but be open to more diverse constituencies with affirmative action strategies which diversify the plutocratic and upwardly mobile strata to create a more diverse 1%.

Globalization, Trade and Populism

Despite the emergence of populist alternatives, the weight of discourse and political influence has shifted decisively to plutocrats in recent decades. Nowhere is this clearer than in cross-party consensus in most democratic states in favour of free trade and economic integration in an ever deepening and broadening form. "Everywhere, we find corporate executives, globalizing politicians and professionals, and consumer elites (merchants, marketers, and advertisers) telling us in public and doing their best to ensure in private that the globalizing agenda of contemporary capitalism driven by the TNCs and their allies is inevitable and, eventually, in the best interests of us all." (Sklair, 2002, 154). These elites simultaneously employ multiple venues of multi-level governance to pursue their ends; from global forums like WTO and IMF; through new regional groupings like the now neo-liberal European Union; to national electoral systems and decentralization and decreased accountability at local levels of government. Within nations, the plutocrats, domestic and transnational, are well placed to dominate politics while continuing adherence to democratic forms. While democratic elections persist, successful candidates must raise large amounts of funds from wealthy individuals and corporations to have any chance of success. Hence they become indebted to corporate lobbyists and cede substantial control over legislation. Hence unsurprisingly, these policies have reflected the interests of wealth in fiscal, domestic and globalizing realms.

Beyond dominance at the national level, there has been a concentration of power across transnational and national institutions in a takeover by corporate interests (even from financial firms discredited by their destabilizing, crisis inducing conduct) as technocratic elites rise to new heights in the political mainstream and behind the scenes. These processes are evident in the pursuit of free trade and economic deals, supportive tax regimes, subsidies and regulations domestically. This is fueled by transnational cultural and ideological production by think tanks and quasi-intellectuals, some operating in synch, others disparate in varied perspectives from libertarian to state capitalist and beyond as strategically suitable to the pursuit of wealth. This distortion in debate has decidedly influenced trade deals, which have reflected corporate and plutocratic interests primarily, inducing opposition. "These powerful allies have a vested interest to promote liberalization including enhanced capital flows, investor rights, intellectual property protections and deregulation with teeth through disputes settlement arrangements. The result could be a weakening of democratic accountability, with states bound to transnational agreements which constrain their actions, while requiring greater restrictions on citizens in the paradox that is pluralist plutocracy". (Finbow, 2016).

Populism's rise is a result in part of a backlash against the consensus among plutocrats in favour of policies of transnationalism and economic liberalization which have increased inequality and reduced life chances for many, in downwardly mobile communities of despair. Central to this has been a growing critique of business as usual in globalized neo-liberalism. It should be noted that this populist backlash and retrenchment to community or nation is driven by objective factors like education, wealth, career and social status as "losers" of globalization; but also by an "important subjective component composed of collective identities and the perception of threat that cannot be reduced to mere socio-demographic disparities." (Teney et. al 2013). Regressive populism clearly retains an element of national chauvinism

which cannot be neglected. Yet the disparities between winners and losers cannot be ignored, as global and technological changes drive ever greater inequalities in life chances. Piketty issues this warning about the one-sided character of trade deals and globalization:

The main lesson for Europe and the world is clear: as a matter of urgency, globalization must be fundamentally re-oriented. The main challenges of our times are the rise in inequality and global warming. We must therefore implement international treaties enabling us to respond to these challenges and to promote a model for fair and sustainable development. (Piketty, 2016).

As it stands, globalization is producing tendencies towards escalating inequalities, as elites move capital, avoid taxes, and produce trading arrangements designed by and for corporate entities. Too little of the benefits of this fluidity and productivity filters down to other sectors of society. Elites shelter revenues and avoid domestic taxation while promoting costly militarism. All of this contributes to a sense of marginalization which demagogues can exploit to rally the disaffected, in keeping with US practices, along racial and social cultural lines, dividing those who should be collaborating and directing fire to “others” – Muslims, Mexicans and on trade even Europeans and Canadians who are scapegoated for economic problems generated by globalization and economic change guided by and for plutocrats.

Trumpism as “faux populism”: the trade file

The portrayal of Trump, the billionaire TV celebrity, as a “populist” has always been disingenuous. Yet the policy conflicts within his administration, between so-called globalist and nationalist factions in the Trump White House, while still in flux and subject to his volatile personality, illuminates the superficiality in many respects of his populist commitments. Trade policy can provide an example of this. (Finbow, 2017). In some respects, as Mastel (2016) points out, Trump’s positions on trade are not too far from other critiques. His assertions that the global trade “system is broken” reflects other critics of globalization which has destabilizing and disappointing effects, real or perceived, absolute or relative, for many voters. The causes are of course complex and include technological advances, but also certain aspects of trade policy, such as China’s WTO admission as its controlled state capitalism and lack of free, strong civil society organizations (such as unions) can be seen to give it unfair advantages in manufacturing trade. Similarly, Trump is not alone as a critic of NAFTA; indeed many labour organizations have criticized NAFTA for its negative effects on workers, and solidification of corporate dominance through investment disputes systems. These same sectors also opposed new deals like those with Europe in the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) or Asia in the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) which were seen to replicate similar pro-corporate biases.

Without consistency so far, anti-globalist, trade skeptical elements appear to be continuing in policy development. TPP was abandoned, TTIP stalled, and NAFTA renegotiation looms. As it has developed, the trade team includes some persons known for strong critiques of the existing trading arrangements. The new USTR, Robert Lighthizer for instance, has previously been a trade lawyer who advocated higher steel tariffs to protect domestic consumers. He has been a frequent critic of WTO disputes mechanisms, despite the central US role in forging that institution, blaming the WTO appeals process for changes in arbitration rules which should be subject to negotiation among signatories. Peter Navarro, the head of a new White House National Trade Council, has been a strong critic of China’s role in the global trade system. Therefore, the US trade strategy brought forward after the inauguration emphasized themes of fairness and preference for bilateral deals.

The overarching purpose of our trade policy – the guiding principle behind all our actions in this key area – will be to expand trade in a way that is freer and fairer for all Americans. Every action we take with respect to trade will be designed to increase our economic growth, promote job creation in the United States, promote reciprocity with our trading partners, strengthen our manufacturing base and our ability to defend ourselves, and expand our agricultural and services industry exports. As a general matter, we believe that these goals can be best accomplished by focusing on bilateral negotiations rather than multilateral negotiations – and by renegotiating and revising trade agreements when our goals are not being met. (USTR, 2017).

The strategy went on to stress some traditional American goals, such as promoting access for agricultural exports, ensuring intellectual property rights protections, modernizing agreements to ensure US business access to markets, and prevention of dumping of subsidized goods in the US. But it included elements reflecting Lighthizer's skepticism about the WTO, especially any efforts to use disputes resolutions processes to force changes in US laws and regulatory practices; "even if a WTO dispute settlement panel – or the WTO Appellate Body – rules against the United States, such a ruling does not automatically lead to a change in U.S. law or practice. Consistent with these important protections and applicable U.S. law, the Trump Administration will aggressively defend American sovereignty over matters of trade policy". (USTR, 2017).

The early policy proposals have included relatively aggressive protectionist measures, with threats of taxes or tariffs ranging up to 35% for layoffs related to movement of firms overseas and 45% tariffs on Chinese imports. (Economist 2016). Subsequent proposals were slightly moderated, including a potential 10% levy for businesses to operate in the US, use of phytosanitary rules to discourage food imports (O'Connor 2017) a 20% surcharge on Mexican imports to pay for construction of a border wall (Jacobs et. al. 2017), and actual 20% surcharge on Canadian softwood lumber. (Nicholas and Vieira 2017). In addition the strategies propose taxation changes, including import surcharges and export tax credits, and ending import deductibility. These measures would make it more difficult for other nations to gain access to US markets and potentially could violate WTO provisions. (Clark 2017). The American president had been a vocal critic of mega trade deals which he declared unfair to American interests. He pledged to negotiate "fair" bilateral deals which would bring jobs to Americans. According to Trump, "we are absolutely going to keep trading. I am not an isolationist. And they probably think I am. I'm not at all. I'm a free trader. I want free trade, but it's got to be fair trade. It's got to be good deals for the United States." (Bradshaw, 2016).

Trump's populist appeal might seem to threaten the epistemic consensus in favour of transnational institutionalised economic integration and trade liberalization. But the appointment of conventional plutocrats to his administration provides a counterweight. Yet the administration team and policy directions on trade (as in many other fields) has been slow to coalesce and subject to volatility and adjustment. Even GOP lawmakers have become impatient with the President's volatile, inflammatory and changeable pronouncement on trade with allies like Canada and Mexico. While the alteration in attitudes towards trade policy were portrayed by Trump as reflecting populist concerns, they were arguably created by transnational urban corporate elites (much like Trump himself). For self-interested reasons, notably to pursue better deals on intellectual property, agricultural good, trade in services etc. plutocratic interests reframed transnational integration as a liberalization project which targeted increased inequalities and widespread insecurity in working and middle classes which became susceptible to a protectionist message via billionaire funded "populist" movements. (Guvenen et al

2017). Observers already note a marked reduction in inflammatory rhetoric (outside the President's tweets) as the trade policy documents reverted to a "sober critique of the limitations of some of the current trade arrangements, problems that many critics ... have long identified as serious challenges for U.S. trade policy." (Alden, 2017).

The administration may well employ anti-dumping measures, safeguards, and potential tax adjustments to redress trade imbalances and discourage firms from establishing plants outside the country, though early claims in such job protection have already eroded. (Welch, 2017). And potential for job losses via disruption of complex supply chains and retaliation from existing trade partners (Egan, 2017) may well dissuade dramatic changes over time (with some early threats already abandoned). There could be considerable push back from the Republican Party, closely associated with the plutocratic class and with many allies in the business sector. Corporate America will be divided, with a few benefitting from protection measures. But many would suffer from interruption of transnational agreements and trade, so political backlash can be expected, with significant consequences in the complex US political system. "Many sectors of the U.S. economy rely on exports and foreign direct investment, and businesses in these sectors have not yet weighed in against the dangers to their workers and profitability the America First strategy would create" (Fidler, 2017). These powerful interests, working through the complex Congressional process, are likely to exert substantial constraint on trade policy experimentation where plutocratic interests are affected.

There is considerable evidence already that the billionaire celebrity was not entirely genuine in his populist leanings, a fact attested by the appointment of numerous Wall Street insiders. These individuals and associated interests could play a role in moderating the trade agenda going forward, given the corporate interest in the liberalized global order. On fiscal and spending policies, financial regulation, tax reforms, health care etc. this combination of establishment appointees in the White House and fiscally conservative Republicans in Congress will produce policy far from the preferences or interests of Trump's core grassroots constituencies in the white working class. "The tragedy is that Trump's program will only strengthen the trend towards inequality" through tax and spending cuts and deregulation aimed squarely at the self-interest of plutocrats. (Pilketty, 2016). Early indications of the bargaining strategies which are likely to take shape in the coming weeks suggest that a move to trade bilateralism will be employed to deepen, not lessen plutocratic pressures. They will be used to leverage American bargaining power to secure TPP plus in bilateral deals (and a redrafted NAFTA) with individual states with less ability to bargain with the American economic superpower. (Freund, 2017). This will include solidification of intellectual property protections, investor rights provisions and the like. As with Brexit, (Fox, 2016), where a neo-liberal approach underpinned the leave decision to a great degree (Harmes, 2017), the intention will be to further neo-liberal goals of deregulation, austerity and privatization, while avoiding transnational engagements which might put the brakes on this plutocratic driven agenda.

Conclusion:

Political competition in advanced capitalism can now be usefully viewed through a framework highlighting exclusionary and inclusionary movements and cosmopolitan and communitarian frames – with diversity on each dimension shaped by social class on elite versus mass, plutocratic versus populist lines. This framework has been developed so far in preliminary fashion, and requires operationalization for empirical investigation and development. Specification of definitions will be needed to develop its usefulness as an analytical framework for comparative analysis. The positioning of political leaders and

movements is preliminary and impressionistic. A more solidified assessment will require detailed empirical work in each political context. Investigation via in depth interviews of followers and leaders of these different factions, coupled with content analysis of party documents, stakeholder proposals and media commentaries would be required to advance understanding in specific natural cases. There will be particularistic features in different countries and institutional settings which require differentiation, which explain why both plutocratic and populists positions, inclusive and exclusive, cosmopolitan and communitarian, are differentially developed and expressed in different cases. In future work using this framework, this author will develop this empirical dimension via in qualitative assessments of party and leaders' positions in comparative analyses of Anglo-Saxon and potentially in European states.

The case of trade policy is instructive. A point of consensus across parties on the so-called left and right divide, the continuity of approaches and policies over the past three decades has been notable. As with Brexit, Trump, who drew upon a regressive populist base for much of his support, despite being a denizen of the billionaire's plutocratic club, arguably poses a potential threat to this plutocratic-driven epistemic consensus. Yet any reformulation in trade looks set to reflect the values and interests of America's own plutocracy, leveraging the country's strength in the global economy via more beneficial bilateral deals with states almost all of which would be weaker dependent partners. Similar impulses seem to motivate the leaver's agenda post-Brexit with trade deals pursued unfettered by EU social standards. Other elements of the UK Conservative austerity platform, and the Trump agenda in economic policy (tax and spending cuts) seem particularly punitive of their own constituencies on the disaffected populist right. (Dewey and Jan, 2017). The continued use of populism to entrench support for conservative exclusionary plutocrats and further their self-interested, regressive goals has been successful and will continue as a political tactic in future.

However, inclusive plutocrats' centrist and "third way" progressive neoliberalism has done little to alleviate, and arguably much to exaggerate, inequalities and insecurities. These "globalists" pursuit of ever deepening transnational integration, notwithstanding the detrimental effects for communities and employment, has created conditions for a populist backlash of a regressive nature, prone to scapegoating minority and especially immigrant communities which, far from being a burden, have net long term benefits for economies. Progressive populist organizing does bring promise, yet plutocratic dominance of all major parties prevents significant electoral impact in pluralist plutocracies to date. The success of progressive movements in generating a populist, inclusive, cosmopolitan response to regressive, nativist populist challengers – and to reach members of disaffected segments who can potentially be shaken from regressive positions which are contrary to their self-interest - could determine the extent to which the deconsolidation of democracy continues.

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