

# The Rise of American Populism & Electoral Exploitation

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## ***Economic Influences***

- Trends of economic stagnation & inequality, leading to economic and political dissatisfaction with ineffective status quo
  - Worsened by 2008 Financial Crisis
  - Flat real incomes, automated and outsourced jobs, and massive wealth inequality
- Economic uncertainty leads to support for populist candidates as a form of economic protectionism

## ***Racial Influences***

- Racism is continuous in far-right reactionary movements, but reasons and politics change
- Starting in the 1920s, the use of racial reactionism in populist movements is a response to an increasingly liberal society
- Populists like Barnett in the 1960s and Trump show continuity through nostalgia of a white status-quo

## ***Historical Influences***

- In American politics, there has been a suspicion of elites since its founding
- Populists starting from McCarthy influenced conservatives from the 1950s onward
- Trump took Reagan's anti-big government stance further by instilling suspicion of US federal institutions, like the CDC and DOJ

**The modern United States has seen devolution towards a 'Frankenstate' fueled by abuse of electoral institutions. Politically, this trend is driven by populism, which has elements of economic, racial, and historical nostalgia.**

## **Democratic Backsliding**

- *Lack of consequences for financial elite after 2008 crisis due to political ties*
- *Massive wealth inequality*
- *Restriction of immigration and voting rights*
- *Passing of stricter voting laws based off suspicion of election fraud*
- *Electoral mistrust leading to January 6th riots in front of Capitol*

- 1) *Are the 2008 financial crisis and trends of economic stagnation and inequality significant causes of modern American populism?*
- 2) *To what extent is populism under the movement that elected Trump continuous with far-right populist movements in American history?*
- 3) *Is there any historical relationship between the rise of President Reagan and the rise of President Trump?*
- 4) *How has the modern Republican Party taken advantage of outdated electoral institutions to gain political power?*

## ***Electoral Exploitation***

### Electoral College

- Advantages small states over large states because it allocates votes on Senate and House seats
- "General ticket" allocates electoral votes entirely to the winner of the state, with nothing for loser
- Republicans had a 3.5-point advantage due to efficient vote distribution
- Not intended to be undemocratic, but has become an element of the Frankenstate

### Senate

- Equal representation for all states, which did not use to have drastically different populations
- Republicans had a 5.0-point advantage in 2020
- Filibuster renders it ineffective w/o compromise

### House of Representatives

- House districts are drawn by state legislators who tend to be loyal to their party's interest
- The '08-'11 REDMAP program and Tea Party electoral success led to outsize Republican power in state legislatures
  - Used power to draw gerrymandered maps leading to a 2.1-point advantage

### **Recommended Literature:**

*"The Social and Political Costs of the Financial Crisis, 10 Years Later"* - Harvard Business Review

*Breaking the Two-Party Doom Loop: The Case for Multiparty Democracy in America* - Lee Drutman

*"A History of American Reactionary Movements: From the Klan to Donald Trump"* - Christopher Sebastian Parkman

*The Age of Reform* - Richard Hofstadter