



CENTER FOR HOMELAND
DEFENSE AND SECURITY
NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL



HSx: INCREASING IDEOLOGICAL POLARIZATION



June 2017

CONTEXT

Two factors leading to the increase in ideological polarization:

- **Populism**

- Idea that common people are exploited by privileged elite (established politicians) and their supporters (rich, intellectuals).
- Can exist on the left or the right.

- **Ethnic nationalism** rather than civic nationalism

- Nationalism helps to define relations between state, citizens, and outside world.
- Exclusive nationalism divides “us” from “them.”
 - Used to win votes in rich democracies (e.g., Western Europe/United States).
 - Used to distract people from their hardships in autocracies (e.g., North Korea).
- Religious groups as an example of ethnic nationalism.
- Religious identity as a cross-border nationality.

CONTEXT (CONT'D)

Current factors driving increase in populism and identity politics:

▪ **Demographics**

- Population growth, urbanization, growing and shifting global middle class
 - Percentage of global middle class in West decreasing as population increases in Asia

▪ **Economic factors**

- Slow recovery from 2008 financial crisis, threatening gains made in poverty reduction
- Unemployed or underemployed citizens will look for identity elsewhere

▪ **Governance**

- Unifying population against the “other” as a distraction from poor governance
 - “Other” can be within the country or external

▪ **Technology**

- World more interconnected
 - Easier to connect with others in same self-identified ethnic or ideological group globally

RISING ETHNIC NATIONALISM IN RUSSIA

- Post-USSR Russia trying to maintain global influence.
- Rising role of ethnic nationalism.
 - Focus on Russian ethnic, religious, linguistic bonds rather than state citizenship.
 - Invasion of Ukraine after it sought to move closer to the West.
 - Individuals who express opposition within Russia described as “foreign agents.”
 - Russia sees itself as a last stand of conservative Christianity vs liberalism of Western Europe.
 - Leading to a resistance against multiculturalism and the vices of liberalism.
- President Vladimir Putin aiming to create common sense of purpose.
 - Distracts from domestic struggles (e.g., low oil prices and economic downturn).
 - Russia vs the world paradigm stemming from decrease of global power and influence.
- Nationalism likely to increase under Putin’s control.
 - Violent nationalistic responses to neighbors (e.g., Ukraine, Georgia).

IMPLICATIONS: POLITICS

- Erosion of tolerance and diversity traditionally seen throughout United States and Western Europe.
 - Threatens global appeal of values.
 - Populism rising in the West in response to immigration, increasing economic inequality, and the decline of middle class.
 - Populism drives wedges between citizens and challenges systems of government and international law.
- Use of nationalism to shore up control in countries like China and Russia where governance is weak.
 - Alternative ideas and identities viewed via technology challenge national interests.
 - Influences competition between Western liberal democracy and authoritarian nationalism.
- Ethnic nationalism inflaming identity conflicts in Africa, Middle East, and Asia.
- Potential of conflicts to spread regionally if ethnic identity goes beyond borders.

IMPLICATIONS: ECONOMICS

- “Us” vs “them” mindset could affect international trade and economy.
 - If country becomes isolationist/anti-globalization, might back out of international trade deals or put greater restrictions on imports.
 - West starting to weigh costs of trade liberalization against gains.
 - Other regions will follow lead if United States and other countries decide on protectionism.
- Slower rates of growth, increasing income inequality, and the perception of losing out sparks demands to improve and protect living standards.
 - Includes protectionism and isolationism.
 - Looking to the “other” as cause of problems.
 - More receptive to “exclusive” ideologies.

IMPLICATIONS: SOCIETY

- Populism a possible backlash against social change.
 - Western societies gradually becoming more socially liberal.
- Religious institutions gain greater role in society, replacing secular organizations
 - Take over role that organizations such as trade unions have played traditionally.
 - Could replace ideologies (i.e., liberalism) as unifiers.
 - Take care of their own in times of weak governance or economic troubles.
 - Alleviates public needs but raises tension with governments/others over authorities and norms.
 - If more effective than governments membership and influence increases.
- Religions face increasing competition for control of the faith.
 - Radical voices push moderate voices aside.
 - Anger and drama attracts more attention, more likely leading to action than to compromise.
 - Extremist leaders with charisma gain greater foothold.
 - Increasingly become actors in regional and global politics.

IMPLICATIONS: HUMAN RIGHTS

- Populism challenges both internal and global human rights.
 - Politicians claim certain laws (e.g., privacy, certain judicial restraints) protect terrorist suspects and others at the expense of citizens' safety.
 - Scapegoating refugees, immigrant communities, minorities
 - International treaties protecting human rights seen as standing in the way of safety.
- Increasing threat to democracy.
 - If governments take away the rights of the “other,” they also take away laws protecting “us.”
 - Populist leaders challenge independence of judiciary for upholding laws.

IMPLICATIONS: TECHNOLOGY

- Advancements in technology and social media are connecting the world.
 - Spread of ethnic nationalism accelerated by social media.
 - Technological innovations affect available jobs, adding to frustrations of current economic status.
- Virtual activism could replace actual political participation.
 - Lower voter turnout could mean more extreme policymakers have greater influence.
- Social media pushing news and information through existing networks.
 - Self-selecting and narrow broadcasts rather than traditional sources of information.
 - Reinforcing and confirming existing beliefs rather than challenging ideas.
 - Leads to stronger polarization and self-segregation in society.
- Digital divide can leave some behind based on location, education, ethnicity, or age, fueling populist discontent.

EFFORTS FOR RESOLUTION

- Civic nationalism can counter ethnic nationalism, as long as it is inclusive.
 - Exclusive civic nationalism raises the same issues of “us” vs “them” (i.e., isolationism).
- Liberal global democracy holds values of tolerance and inclusiveness.
 - Populism or ethnic nationalism is often a reaction to the spread or the perceived spread of liberal global democracy.

RESOURCES

- The following resources provide further information on this topic:
 - National Intelligence Council. “Global Trends: Paradox of Promise.” January 2017. <https://www.dni.gov/files/images/globalTrends/documents/GT-Full-Report.pdf>
 - Pew Research Center, “Populism and Global Engagement: Europe, North America and Emerging Economies.” December 15, 2016. <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/12/15/populism-and-global-engagement-europe-north-america-and-emerging-economies/>
 - Human Rights Watch. “The Dangerous Rise of Populism: Global Attacks on Human Rights Values.” 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/dangerous-rise-of-populism>

- Additional research materials and information sources regarding this topic can be found in the associated *Literary & Scholastic Resource List*.

Literary and Scholastic Resources – Increasing Ideological Polarization

Date of information: March 2017

Overview: While not exhaustive, the following resources provide a roadmap to understanding primary drivers of the increase in nationalism and polarization, both domestically and globally. These resources provide a baseline of understanding, but as the strategic environment continues to evolve, new data will become available and resource lists will require updates.

Module Resource Lists to Cross-Reference: Major Economies Confront Shrinking Workforce, Changing Role of the Individual, Middle East Instability Fuels Extremism & Terrorism, Growth of the Global Middle Class, Drought Constrains Economic Development

Organizations:

- **National Intelligence Council:** The National Intelligence Council (NIC) supports the Director of National Intelligence in the role as head of the Intelligence Community (IC) and is the IC's center for long-term strategic analysis. The NIC publishes many reports, including a quadrennial trends publication that includes information on changes in the global political environment.
<https://www.dni.gov/index.php/about/organization/national-intelligence-council-who-we-are>
- **Pew Research Center:** Pew produces a broad range of research products and trend reporting on specific topics within the fields of politics and social issues, both globally and domestically. Information on research studies and publications can be found at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/>

Recent Publications and Journal Articles:

- **Global Trends: Paradox of Progress:** A publication of the NIC, this trends report includes references to instability in the Middle East as continuing to build momentum for terrorist organizations. It also includes a region-by-region highlight of trends over the next five years, which expands on issues specific to the region.
 - *Citation:* National Intelligence Council. "Global Trends: Paradox of Promise." January 2017. <https://www.dni.gov/files/images/globalTrends/documents/GT-Full-Report.pdf>
- **Populism and Global Engagement: Europe, North America and Emerging Economies:** A Pew Research Center presentation examines how populism and the corresponding skepticism toward international trade and immigration have grown in European and U.S. politics in recent years. They contrast this with emerging economies, which are still interested in expanding their international engagement.
 - *Citation:* Pew Research Center, "Populism and Global Engagement: Europe, North America and Emerging Economies." December 15, 2016. <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/12/15/populism-and-global-engagement-europe-north-america-and-emerging-economies/>
- **The Dangerous Rise of Populism: Global Attacks on Human Rights Values:** A publication of Human Rights Watch, this report discusses the potential effect of rising populism and nationalism on human rights, both within a country and throughout the world. It highlights countries that have seen a rise in populist politicians.

- *Citation:* Human Rights Watch. “The Dangerous Rise of Populism: Global Attacks on Human Rights Values.” 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/dangerous-rise-of-populism>

Other Resources:

- League of nationalists: This article from The Economist examines the different factors that could be driving ethnic nationalism as opposed to civic nationalism around the world. It looks at the role of globalization, economics, and technology in spreading nationalist ideas and leaders.
 - *Citation:* The Economist. “League of nationalists: All around the world, nationalists are gaining ground. Why?” November 19, 2016. <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21710276-all-around-world-nationalists-are-gaining-ground-why-league-nationalists>