



*Social Divisions, Welfare, and the Welfare State during Trump's
Administration*

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Received: 01 / 10 / 2022

Accepted: 06 / 02 / 2023

Published: 18 / 02 / 2023

Abstract:

Welfare has been always a hot subject in American politics. In this paper, we will endeavor to study Donald Trump's approach to reform welfare and the welfare state as well as the impact of social divisions on his administration's strategies to tackle poverty. We attempt to demonstrate the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and religion in U.S. politics and public policy during Trump's Administration and their impact on poor American citizens. Although the U.S. economy flourished to some extent during the Trump Administration, poor people, that is to say those whose income was low, were not supposed to wait for financial assistance from the government. Trump did not focus on poor people in his strategies to reform welfare; instead, he aimed to increase military spending and cut government spending by focusing on food stamps.

Keywords: Covid-19; poverty; social divisions; Trump's Administration; welfare; welfare state

I. INTRODUCTION

Donald Trump, the rich American businessman was inaugurated as U.S. President on January 20, 2017. He pledged to “Make America Great Again”. The administrations that preceded Trump's tried to reform welfare. The passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act in 1996 made a turning point in the history of reforming welfare and the U.S. welfare state. During the Bush Administration, the government focused on the military system and made efforts to restore stability at home and abroad since U.S. troops were in Afghanistan and Iraq. President Barack Obama shifted the government's attention towards home issues and introduced a new program to reform the whole U.S. welfare system by targeting health care.

The questions that will be raised at the heart of this research paper are the following:

- How far did social divisions impact politics and social welfare policy during the Trump Administration?
- What was Trump's approach to welfare and poverty?

President Donald Trump was a controversial personality that the U.S. political scene has never witnessed. He aimed overtly at banning immigration from Islamic countries and Mexico by building a huge wall. He withdrew his country from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change Mitigation, and he attacked furiously women from different social and racial backgrounds. In 2020, as the Covid-19 pandemic appeared and crippled the global economic system, President Trump used prejudiced ideas in his rhetoric against the Chinese, instead of introducing concrete solutions to control the situation.

The research method used throughout this paper is descriptive. We draw upon primary and secondary resources and use the collected data to support our hypothesis. Our aim here is to figure out how President Donald Trump tackled issues related to poverty, to see if social divisions mattered during his administration, and to what extent they affected social policy programs. We will try also to figure out his approach to welfare and how the welfare reform policy evolved during his presidency.

First, we need to define the following terms: welfare, the welfare state, and social divisions. Social divisions are “sets of categories. Social categories are not simply given. They have to be established and maintained and the process through which they appear is known as social division.”

The term “welfare state” is controversial, ambiguous, and has no precise definition in economics. The term welfare state first appeared in Germany and its German version *Wohlfahrtsstaat* in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. When scholars use it, they refer generally to a comprehensive system whereby the state undertakes to protect the health and well-being of its citizens, by providing pensions, hospitals, sickness, and unemployment benefits. Scholars define the American welfare state as the set of direct expenditure programs such as Social Security and AFDC.¹ For others, the American welfare state is a combination of direct and indirect spending such as loans, loan guarantees as well as tax expenditures (indirect spending forms the so-called “hidden welfare state”). (Howard, 1997, p.5). Some scholars refer to the experience of the welfare state in the United States of America as the evolution of “the New Deal Order” namely “liberalism.” (Kessler-Harris & Vaudagna, 2018, p.5).

The term “welfare” generally means “well-being” (Katz, 2001; Gordon, 1994), and it appeared in the U.S. Constitution: “the general welfare” and it referred to providing well-being by the government (national or local) for all citizens, “The Congress shall have Power to lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises, to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defence and general Welfare of the United States.” (U.S. Constitution, art .I , sec.8, cl.I.,). The meaning of “welfare” has changed drastically in the contemporary United States. Michael Wiseman defines welfare as follows: “By convention, “welfare” is applied to all programs of public assistance that give aid to individuals or families on the basis of need and

¹Based on works of such scholars as Abramovitz, M. (1968). *Regulating the lives of women* ; Roy Lubove (1968). *The Struggle for Social Security, 1900–1935*; Patterson, J.T. (1986) *America's Struggle against poverty, 1900–1985*.

means.”(Wiseman, 1996, p.598). Noam Chomsky provides a deep explanation of the notion of welfare in the U.S.: “What is called “welfare” is public programs that provide funds for poor people...Public programs that provide funds for rich people are not called “welfare”, but in fact that is what most of the public funds are.” (Chomsky,1993). For Premilla Nadasen and her co-authors welfare is “virtually synonymous with federal cash aid to poor single mothers and their children: Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) before 1996...” (Nadasen, Mittelstadt, & Chappell, 2009, p.1). Linda Gordon points out that:

In two generations, the meaning of “welfare” has reversed itself. What once meant prosperity, good health, and good spirits now implies poverty, bad health, and fatalism. A word that once evoked images of pastoral contentment now connotes slums, depressed single mothers, and neglected children, and even crime. Today “welfare” means grudging aid to the poor, when once it referred to a vision of a good life. (Gordon, 1994, p.1)

Michael Katz affirms that “Welfare had lost (its) inclusive and positive meaning ... now it signif (ies) only public assistance programs—which to most people meant Aid to Dependent Children.” (Katz, 2001,p.4). According to Anne Daguere, welfare has two meanings in the U.S.: “it can refer to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), a cash assistance program for single-parent families; or it can refer to other means-tested programs such as housing assistance, health care (Medicaid), food stamps (i.e. the Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP]) and social assistance for people with disabilities (Social Security Income [SSI]).” (Daguere, 2017, pp.183–186).

In the present paper, when we refer to “welfare”, we refer to public assistance programs. Even though there are many assistance programs for the poor, when people refer to “welfare,” they mean Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)—the program designed for single mothers and their dependent children (Handler, 1995, p.1). Welfare reform is the name given to 1996 changes made in the U.S. public assistance program designed to provide cash benefits to single mothers (U.S. Congress, 1996).

It should be borne in mind, however, that the aim of this paper is not to explain how the welfare state historically developed during the Trump Administration, nor to study the formal structure of the American welfare state during his administration. Simply put, this study is an attempt to understand Trump’s approach to welfare and welfare reform.

1. Welfare before the Trump Administration: Barack Obama’s Administration

One decade after passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act in 1996—which was supposed to end the racialized debates around welfare, public assistance for low-income families remains a hot political issue in the U.S. (Handler, 1995, pp.140–141). With the election of Obama as president of the U.S., many Americans (academics, politicians, public) assumed that Obama’s Administration would focus on low-income families, who were disproportionately African Americans (Handler, 1995).

America failed to provide government-guaranteed health care or family allowances. Unlike other industrialized nations in the world, the United States of America does not guarantee medical services and health insurance as a right of citizenship (Noble, 1997, p.7; Quadagno, 1994, p.4). In his project related to social policy, Barack Obama sought to tackle primarily the issue of healthcare.

Barack Obama’s approach to addressing poverty had been hotly criticized because welfare spending increased from \$563 billion in 2008 to \$745 billion in 2012 (Conley, 2017, p.35). Even though the percentage of unemployment decreased from 9.6 percent in 2009 to 7.8 percent in 2013, the rate of American families who benefited from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programme (SNAP), known previously as “food stamps”, rose from 10.9 percent to 15 percent during the Obama Administration (Conley, 2017, p.35). Thus, Newt Gingrich, a former speaker of the House and 2008 presidential candidate, said that Obama would be remembered as the “food-stamp president.” (Conley, 2017, p.35).

President Barack Obama and the Democratic Party followed a “patriarchalist” path and had an “intersectional sexism” perspective to tackle the issues of poverty in the United States during the early twenty-first century. That is to say, they focused on the important role that

“private patriarchal families” could play to cure the social woes in American society. For them, managing single mothers’ lives is the key solution to combat poverty.

His administration’s antipoverty policies had been highly rejected by Republicans as they targeted the “undeserving” groups. Hence, his ambitions to change the U.S. welfare system were thwarted. In 2010, the Republican Party (or Grand Old Party) had become more powerful as it controlled the House. In 2014, the Republican Party increased its House majority, and controlled the Senate and also two-thirds of state legislatures. Those Republican coalitions prepared the groundwork for the election of a Republican president in 2017. Even though, different movements emerge to fight racial inequality such as “#blacklivesmatter”, they failed to tackle “interesting mobilizations of misogyny, discrimination, and patriarchy that were omnipresent in bipartisan social policy” during Bill Clinton’s and Barack Obama’s Administrations.

The roots of the “Tea Party”—which had been active during the Obama Administration to oppose Obama’s initiatives related to social welfare policy—can be traced back to the 1970s. Some members of the Tea Party who played a key role in its establishment were: former Republican elites who were for promoting low-tax and also anti-regulation measures. The Tea Party ideology includes hatred of Barack Obama; a “visceral” opposition to redistributive and pro-poor social policies; and a focus on limiting federal government intervention.

On the evening of March 23, 2010—a few hours after President Barack Obama had signed into law the Affordable Care and Patient Protection Act also called “Obamacare”, a proposal that targeted the reform of the healthcare system—at least forty Tea Parties gathered in a small café on Main Street in Brockton, Massachusetts (Williamson, Skocpol & Coggin, 2011, p.25). Tea parties sought to stimulate Republicans’ political awareness in the whole nation, and hence contributed to the return of the Republican Party to the political scene with much enthusiasm and confidence.

A series of events preceded the Tea Party reappearance: On January 28, 2009, Rush Limbaugh coined the Term “Porkulus” to describe the upcoming “stimulus” package”. By February 8, the word appeared on the New York Times “Idea of the Day” blog. On February 16, 2009, an anti-stimulus protest supported by commentator Michelle Malkin and Americans for Prosperity took place in Seattle. Follow-up protests were held in Denver, CO where Obama signed the stimulus bill, and in Mesa AZ, where Obama referred to his mortgage plan (Williamson, Skocpol & Coggin, 2011, p.38).

On February 19, 2009, CNBC commentator Rick Santelli, also a Chicago Mercantile Exchange Trader, demonstrated his strong opposition to Obama’s mortgage modification plan, he argued:

The government is promoting bad behavior This is America. How many of you people want to pay for your neighbor’s mortgage, that has an extra bathroom, and can’t pay their bills? Raise their hand! President Obama, are you listening? ... we’re thinking of having a Chicago Tea Party in July. All you capitalists that want to show up to Lake Michigan, I’m going to start organizing. (Zucker, 2009)

That verbal explosion spread quickly across the nation, and it generated a sentiment of disgust amid groups who tend to oppose all liberal policies and initiatives. The Tea Party led to the emergence of right-wing activism in the United States and shaped the political arena during the 2010 midterm elections. The Tea Party is “a new incarnation of longstanding strands in US conservatism ... (with) some innovative organizational features.” (Williamson, Skocpol, & Coggin, 2011, p. 26).

In the 2020 budget proposals, Trump aimed at increasing spending on the military system and cutting spending on domestic needs (Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps, and so forth). This shows his negative political vision of the welfare system. In addition to this, his political rhetoric was characterized by biased ideas against certain categories from “non-white” backgrounds, such as Asians, Arabs (particularly Muslims), Latinos, and women “white” or “colored”.²

²We are against categorising people according to the colour of their skin. Therefore, we use quotations whenever we employ biased adjectives to describe certain persons, communities or social groups.

2. The Welfare State during Donald Trump's Administration: Republicans' Victory

Hillary D. Clinton and Donald J. Trump were the main and final candidates at the end of the 2016 presidential campaign. The Democratic candidate Hilary Rodham Clinton had a long experience as a politician: as a first lady, a U.S. senator for New York, and also as a secretary of state. However, the Republican Donald Trump has been a well-known American businessman and his party's slogan was "America First". Trump's candidacy has been considered the least conventional in modern political history (Rockman, 2016, p. 437).

In his rhetoric during the 2016 presidential primary campaign, Trump aimed at gaining public support by defining himself as an "anti-politician" or "anti-establishment" candidate (Keyam, 2018, p.183). His rhetorical policy and strategy—which were characterized by a tone of sexism, racism, and xenophobia—reflected his intention to depict his character as a successful businessman who came from "outside the political realm" to make America great, again ((Keyam, 2018, p.183). It should be emphasized that the period that followed the 2016 presidential elections was marked by a phenomenon of "Fake News", i.e., false stories (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 212).

The "email scandal" affected badly Hilary Clinton's race for the presidency. Hilary Clinton blamed Trump's campaign because it violated every rule of the presidential campaign; and some commentators, political pundits, and media personalities assumed that his chance to win the elections was very little (Kowalski, 2018, p.1). In her memoir entitled *What Happened*, Hilary Clinton reveals that former FBI chief James Comey and his reopening of the Federal Bureau Intelligence (FBI) investigation into her private email server ten days before the vote was the main cause of her defeat (Clinton, 2017). His success was related to a strong affection for his supporters and also his rhetoric of "national populism" (Rowland,2019, p.343). Typical voters for Donald Trump were older white men who live in rural areas, self-employed or blue-collar workers, with a low level of education who share anti-immigration and anti-government sentiments.

The Trump presidency was considered a threat to the U.S. nation because Donald Trump, the rich businessman, "took office as if orchestrating a hostile corporate takeover" (Michaels, 2017, p.52). He had a so-called bread-new vision of America—he considered global warming as a "hoax", he pledged to build a wall along the Mexican border that Mexico would pay for it; deport 11 million illegal or undocumented immigrants, and he also promised immigration bans on certain countries, especially on migrants with an Islamic background. Besides, he pledged to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan, Iraq as well as Syria. Hence, the Republican Party's victory has been declared again with Trump's election as president of the United States.

3. Trump, Capitalism, and the Welfare State

During his presidential campaign, Donald Trump pledged to cut public assistance programs. In April 2018, Trump signed privately an executive order to give the green light to federal agencies to strengthen the work requirements for multiple welfare programs (*CBS News*) Even though Barack Obama succeeded to some extent to refresh the United States economy during his presidency, Donald Trump had convinced his target audience (who were almost older "white" voters) to blame Obama for wasting public money on illegal immigrants, undeserving minorities, and the young (Daguerre,2017, loc.1938).In this section, we attempt to understand the impact of capitalism on the development and the structure of the welfare state during the Trump Administration as well as Trump's approach to welfare.

Conservative policymakers have always aimed at reforming welfare in the U.S. For them, welfare should be a temporary safety net and not a way of life (Ford, 2020). In other

words, welfare should be an opportunity for vulnerable, able-bodied poor and not an obstacle. In his 2018, executive order, "Reducing Poverty in America by Promoting Opportunity and Economic Mobility," President Donald Trump focused on the importance of marriage in fighting poverty in the U.S., and he said that further welfare reform is required, he declared the following: "The welfare system still traps many recipients, especially children, in poverty and needs further reform and modernization to increase self-sufficiency, well-being, and economic mobility." (Ford, 2020).

The Trump Administration made more work restrictions on some food stamps beneficiaries, and it aimed at reducing their number: 688, 000 recipients were supposed to be eliminated from receiving SNAP benefits (Fessler, 2019). This new reform enabled the states, under the supervision of the U.S Department of Agriculture, to force able-bodied individuals who received SNAP benefits, and who had no children or other dependents at home (elderly or disabled), to work at least twenty hours per week (Ford, 2020). This welfare reform was planned to go into effect in April 2020 but the Covid-19 pandemic changed the path of the Trump Administration's strategies to tackle poverty issues and welfare reform matters (Ford, 2020).

Capitalism witnessed a crisis in 2008 because of the global depression, and that crisis had been followed by political instability in the United States and Europe (Fuchs,2018, p.197). The reactions of governments in Europe and North America towards the global economic recession of 2008 were "neoliberal" that focused on cutting expenditures for the welfare state.(Fuchs,2018, p.91 During Trump's presidency, state power and capitalism had changed completely: "authoritarian capitalism based on the direct rule of the billionaire class, nationalism, scapegoating, the friend/enemy scheme law-and-order politics and meditated spectacles." (Fuchs,2018, p.197)

It is important to note that the United States economy flourished during the Trump Administration.³ The U.S. economy has witnessed stability during the Trump presidency because he focused primarily on domestic affairs. For instance, Trump focused on the well-being of American citizens first and neglected foreigners on American soil. He ordered also the military to stop its operations in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan.

There is a correlation between the real Gross Domestic Product (GDP)— previously referred to as Gross National Product (GNP) which stands for the standard measure of the value-added created through the production of goods and services in a country during a given time—in a given country and human well-being: wealth and high-living standards.⁴ The economic stability that the United States has witnessed during the early years of Trump's presidency is the fruit of Obama's efforts. President Donald Trump neglected minorities' rights for welfare and privileged like-minded white businessmen. In his strategy of "America First", Trump implemented trade protectionism through tariffs, especially on imports from China, and established anti-immigration measures. This led to a balance in the U.S. economy to some extent before the Covid-19 crisis.

Despite his racist, sexist, and classist attitudes, as well as his unconventional comments and communicative manners with other governors abroad, he succeeded to some extent to reach his aim: "Make America Great Again".⁵ According to data available in the OECD database, the United States' quarterly gross domestic product in 2020, during the Trump presidency and the pandemic hard times was about 7.4; yet the OECD total is -10.5. Hence, according to available data from OECD, the United States economy is doing well even during the Covid-19 crisis (OECD, 2020). In other words, even though President Trump's rhetoric and attitude were

³For further reading , see, for instance, Heise, A., &Khan, A. S. (2019).The welfare state and liberal democracy: A political economy approach. *World Review of Political Economy*, 10 (2), 220–245.

⁴Recent research reveals that another parameter has been taken into consideration in order to assess a country's status (in addition to GDP or GNP): happiness, see Fox, J. (2012).The Economics of Well-being. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2012/01/the-economics-of-well-being>. For further reading about the link between welfare and ecosystem services, see, Agarwala, M., Atkinson, G., Palmer Fry,B., Homewood K., , Mourato, S., Rowcliffe, M., Wallace, G., &Milner-Gulland,E.J.,(2014). Assessing the relationship between human well-being and ecosystem services: A review of frameworks. *Conservation and Society*, 12 (4), 437–49.

⁵According to data available at <https://www.bea.gov/news/2020/gross-domestic-product-fourth-quarter-and-year-2019-advance-estimate>

unconventional, the status of the U.S. economy has improved during the Trump Era, unlike Obama's. It should be noted, however, that not all Americans benefited from the abundance that the U.S. had witnessed during the Trump presidency. According to information provided by OECD, unlike other democracies in the world (such as Finland, Switzerland, France, Denmark, etc.) income inequality—which refers to the unequal or uneven distribution of wealth—remains higher in the U.S. (OECD, 2020). New challenges have emerged during the last year of Trump's presidency, especially with the uncertain times caused by the pandemic: higher rates of unemployment, social and economic instability: home and abroad.

In 2020 President Trump aimed at reinforcing military spending and reducing spending on such public services as Medicare, Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programme (SNAP) which was called food stamps previously, and housing assistance, in his 2020 budget (Kriston, 2019). That White House budget plan for the fiscal year 2020 aimed to:

- *Re-impose restrictive measures on government (domestic) spending by cutting about \$55 billion in 2020. Aid for housing, food, medicine, research, and other programs would be reduced as well.* (Kriston, 2019)
- *Eliminate the Community Development Block Grant and HOME Investment Partnerships programs. Besides, it aimed to cut spending on the National Housing Trust Fund, impose stringent work requirements, and “triple” rents for housing aid recipients, as well as reduce funds by 16.4 percent.* (Kriston, 2019)
- *Cut \$219 billion from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programme (SNAP). Hence, the budget would reduce SNAP funds (by 30 percent at least).* (Kriston, 2019)
- *Cut \$10 billion in funds from the Social Security Disability program.*
- *Cut \$845 billion from Medicare funds.*
- *Reduce financial support for transportation infrastructure.*
- *Reduce the budget for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency by 31 percent (because climate change is not considered a real threat by the Trump Administration).* (Kriston, 2019)
- *Increase the budget for military spending through Overseas Contingency Operations by hundreds of billions of dollars.*
- *Ask for supplementary financial support from Congress to build a border wall with Mexico. More than \$9 billion was used to construct the wall;* (Kriston, 2019)
- *Impose more restrictive measures on immigrants (request further administrative documents) to access Medicaid: Undocumented and illegal immigrants cannot benefit from Medicaid.* (Kriston, 2019)

Thus, Trump's Administration was not interested in tackling welfare issues and its main intention was to shrink more and more the scope and the size of the welfare state. Felicia Kornbluh and Gwendolyn Mink clarify the point, they state:

Trump's infant presidency and the Republican congressional majority deployed the framework of welfare reform to assail all forms of social provision by the federal government. Eager to choke off access to the safety net, the ruling party variously proposed capped funding, block grants, and work requirements to shrink government programs such as Medicaid, food stamps, housing, and Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI).³ As for welfare—TANF—itsself: Republicans aimed to intensify its disciplinary mechanisms, especially work requirements, in ways that would make poverty assistance virtually unattainable or its terms wholly untenable for poor families. (Kornbluh & Mink, 2019, p.131)

It was clear that President Trump aimed to cut domestic spending and increase military spending in his 2020 budget wish list. Nevertheless, his proposed 2020 budget was a real disaster. Fortunately, the White House 2020 proposed fiscal year budget was not welcomed by both Republicans and Democrats. Besides, it was not confirmed by Congress (Kogan, et al., 2019).

4. "Fascism" and "Neo-nationalism" during the Trump Administration

In this section, we will try to understand how and why "fascism" and "neo-nationalism" appeared in American political life during the Trump Era and shed some light on their impact on welfare policies and the welfare state. We need first to define "fascism" and "neo-nationalism". The term fascism stems from the Italian word *fascis* (a bundle of rods carried before consuls in Ancient Rome to signify their authority); later, by the 1890s the word *fascia* was used in Italy to refer to a political "group or band, usually of revolutionary socialists." (Heywood, 1998, p.212).

Fascism is a "generic term of political abuse ... and is associated most closely with Europe between the world wars, when movements bearing this name took power in Italy and Germany and wreaked havoc in many other European countries." (Berman, 2016).

Fascism "is essentially the attempt to ensure the rule of monopoly capitalism in its purest, most untrammelled, most vulnerable form." (Eagleton, 1976). Fascism emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in an age of globalization, during which capitalism changed radically societies, and destroyed traditional communities, professions, and cultural norms in the Western World (Berman, 2016). That was also a period of immense immigration: peasants moved to industrialized cities, and people from poor countries fled to richer ones (Berman, 2016). With the arrival of the Republican candidate Donald Trump to the political scene, the conservative columnist Robert Kagan and distinguished foreign policy scholar warned, in an article:

This is how fascism comes to America, not with jackboots and salutes (although there have been salutes, and a whiff of violence) but with a television huckster, a phony billionaire, a textbook egomaniac "tapping into" popular resentments and insecurities, and with an entire national political party—out of ambition or blind party loyalty, or simply out of fear—falling into line behind him. (Kagan, 2016)

David Brooks, a conservative political and cultural commentator, shares the same point of view with Robert Kagan, he also warns:

People will be judged by where they stood this time. Those who walked with Trump will be tainted forever after for the degradation of standards and the general election slaughter. The better course for all of us—Republican, Democrat, and independent—is to step back and take the long view, and to begin building for that. (Brooks, 2016)

Other terms that we need to examine here are: "nationalism" and "neo-nationalism". Broadly speaking, nationalism can be defined as "the belief that the nation is the central principle of political organization." (Heywood, 1998). The idea of nationalism appeared during the French Revolution when the revolutionaries protested against Louis XVI in 1789 in the name of the people to form a "French nation." (Heywood, 1998). Hence, the notion of nationalism was associated with revolution and democracy (Heywood, 1998). Nationalism, as a political ideology "asserts that a nation has the political right to constitute itself as an independent, sovereign, political community, because of both a perceived shared history and common destiny." (Haynes, 2021). As a political movement, nationalism is conceived when "a group of people of indeterminate but normally considerable size often but not always living in the same country. [...] believe themselves distinctive and unique, [and manifest] by community ties that are both significant and persistent." (Haynes, 2021).⁶ Nationalism is highly criticized and rejected by internationalists who see it as "insular, backward-looking, and unsuited for the challenges of the post-Cold War world." (Haynes, 2021).

Neo-nationalism is "an ideology articulated by political parties often described as radical, populist, or nativist. In other words, neo-nationalists seek to change politics radically, protect the people's interests from the elites, and preserve the rights and dignities of the natives and exclude immigrants (Svitych, 2018). Trump considers himself a "radical" as he sought to change American politics radically; a "populist" since he encouraged the majority of ordinary

⁶For further reading on nationalism, see for instance, Connor, W., (1994). *Ethnonationalism: The quest for understanding*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. See also Smith, A.D. (1972). *Theories of nationalism*. New York: Harper & Row.

citizens to condemn the self-serving and corrupt elites; and a “nativist” because his main supporters were “white indigenous” Americans (Hynes, 2021, p.40). In other words, the three attributes combined—nationalist, populist, and radicalist—form what we call “neo-nationalism. Simply put, Trump is a “neo-nationalist” American leader.

As a neo-nationalist, Trump is adherent both to market forces and nativism (Haynes, 2021, p.41). He also targeted the cultural, societal, and political threats of “uncontrolled Muslim immigration.” (Haynes, 2021, p.41). Trump had been widely supported by Christian nationalists because they firmly believed that he will re-Christianise America and support persecuted Christians abroad (Haynes, 2021, p.41).

In sum, neo-nationalism in the U.S. combines both Religious nationalism—That is to say, Christian nationalism which is backed by the Christian Right— and First American nationalism—which is secular, and backed by secular conservatives—were both successfully tackled by President Donald Trump (Haynes, 2021, p.42). Besides, Trump’s neo-nationalism in the U.S. is different from other countries’ nationalism in the Western World as it is shaped by the United States’ unique history, culture, society, and politics (Haynes, 2021, p.42).

5. Trump, the Rhetoric of “Disgust”: The Intersections of Race, Class, Gender, and Religion

Trump is one of the most controversial and unprecedented American leaders in American political history. During his administration, stigmatization against different groups and communities became more and more violent. Not only African Americans (“people of color”, but also Arabs (especially Muslims), Mexicans, and Asian Americans have been stigmatized, especially during the pandemic. Trump has benefited from the current events to employ expressions that incite hatred, disgust, and anti-immigration sentiments. A recent study has shown that there is a correlation between disgust sensitivity and anti-immigrant attitudes.

Trump’s comments have been considered “racist” by some commentators. He used “Chinese virus” (or “Kung-flu”)⁷ to refer to a virus that appeared in Wuhan, China. During a press interview, a confrontation took place between an Asian American *CBS News* reporter Weijia Jiang and Trump. President Donald Trump asked the reporter to find answers to her questions related to the pandemic in China. During another press interview, Trump opened his talk with the following expression: “I would like to begin by announcing some important developments in our war against the *Chinese virus*.” (*BBC World*). A reporter asked Trump the following question: “why do you keep calling this “Chinese Virus”? There are reports of dozens of incidents of bias against Chinese Americans in this country?” Your own aid Secretary Azar says he does not use this term. He says ethnicity does not cause the virus. Why do you keep using this?” Trump answered: “Because it comes from China.” The reporter added: “A lot of people say it is racist.” Trump continued: “It is not racist at all, no. Not at all. It comes from China. That’s why. It comes from China.” In his answer to the reporter, Trump stressed the word “CHINA”, because, for him, the virus comes from China. The word “Chinese” is problematic as it associates a pandemic with an ethnicity.

Michael Richardson, a communication scholar who tackles in his works the intersection of power, affect, and violence in culture believes that “the affirmation, amplification, and circulation of disgust is one of the primary affective drivers of Trump’s political success.” (Richardson, 2017, p.1; Kelly, 2020, p.195). Trump’s rhetoric is characterized by the centrality and frequent evocation of “disgust”. (Richardson, 2017, p.1) Indeed, there is a correlation between “disgust”, conservatism, and more extreme politics of ethnonationalism (Richardson, 2017, p.1). Donald Trump has become president of the U.S. despite his “chaotic” and “unconventional” campaign, and this success can be explained by “the appeal of ethnonationalism, racism, voter suppression, economic anxiety, political alienation, media coverage, the errors of the Clinton campaign, (and) the interference of the Russian Intelligence agencies.” (Richardson, 2017, p.4). The triumph of Donald Trump has generated a “fever of Trumpian right-wing populism” which is still spreading in many democracies around the world (Richardson, 2017, p.4). Indeed, the election of Trump in the U.S. (and Brexit in Europe), the

⁷“Wuhan virus” is another racist expression which appeared in the political discourse used by the Trump Administration.

“populist” phenomenon has been extended to other established democracies such as France, Sweden, Poland, Hungary, Greece, and Spain (Margalit, 2019, p.152). It is difficult to define the term “populism” but it commonly refers to “... (the representation of) the will of the people versus some “other,” commonly represented as a corrupt and self-serving elite.” (Margalit, 2019, p. 152)

The Trump presidency has been characterised also by the return of brutal phenomena of anti-black racism, such as police violence against “black” people, in the American society (for example, the assassination of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor). Those incidents led to the intervention of such movements as the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement—a social movement that advocates non-violent civil disobedience and “black” liberty—has reacted to police violence and brutality. Besides, worldwide peaceful reactions took place to morally support the “black” community in the U.S. and abroad.

Trump is known for his misogynist and racist attitudes (Kornbluh & Mink, 2009, p.130). For instance, he tweeted “Send her back!” to attack four Congresswomen: Representative Ilham Omar of Minnesota, Representative Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, Representative Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts, and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York (Bazian, 2019, p.8). In previous tweets, he demonstrated his disgust for countries of origin of the four representatives “women of color: “a complete and total catastrophe, the worst and the most corrupt” then asked those women to “go back and help fix the broken and crime-infested places from which they came.”(Bazian, 2019, p.8).

Stigmatization against various minority groups (who were not seen as “White”) living in the U.S. society by the Trump government has been driven by race, gender, class, and religious biased ideas. Simply put, such social vision parameters as race, class, gender, and religion have been intersected during Trump's Era and their intersection has become obvious in Americans' political, social, and cultural lives. They have been overtly and intentionally used as legitimate criteria by the Trump Administration to justify harsh attitudes against certain target groups, and those groups included:

- Both sexes (females and males) with Asian, African, Arab, or Latino backgrounds or origins,
- Both sexes (females and males) whose faith is Islam,
- Women (females) in general.

However, “white” Americans whose ancestors were “white” successful immigrants from Europe, in particular, were recognized as legitimate citizens in the U.S. Trump himself is a grandson of a German entrepreneur who immigrated to the U.S. in 1885. For Trump, “white” Europeans from countries like Germany, Britain, and Norway, who migrated to the New World in the past, have contributed to the development of the United States, unlike new immigrants whose countries are, for instance, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, and Mexico.

Therefore, during the Trump Administration, racist, classist, gender-based, as well as religion-based or stereotyped attitudes were obviously and widely used in politics and public policy in the U.S. President Trump himself used a clear language of race, gender, religion, and class in his rhetoric. This typology of discourse was absent in Bill Clinton's political speeches.⁸ Unlike other Republican presidents, (except from Ronald Reagan, who targeted “mothers of color” during his administration), the intersection of those social divisions was to some extent absent in other U.S. presidents' political rhetoric.

⁸Even though Bill Clinton targeted welfare recipients, he did not use any obvious and direct biased language, see, for instance, Tahar Djebbar, A. (2020). “The Bill Clinton Rationale for Welfare Reform: Examining Implications of Race, Class, and Gender Using Documents,” *Journal of Urban History* <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144220948812>

6. The 2020s Harsh Times, the Presidential Elections and the Future of the Welfare State in the U.S.

Unlike former presidents in the modern era, Donald Trump is a capitalist and a politician (Fuchs, 2018, p.165). But, at the same time, Trump plays the role of a celebrity and he sought to attract the audience's attention using different means such as social media (Twitter), reality TV, and so on, and his ideology is called "Trumpology" (Fuchs, 2018, p.165).

The world has witnessed a terrible transformation at all levels because of the Covid-19 pandemic that appeared initially in Wuhan, in China, then has spread rapidly all over the world: from Asia to Europe, then Africa, to Canada, and the Americas. Consequently, the Coronavirus pandemic resulted in a global hysteria and an abrupt change in people's routines. Many workers have been compelled to stay indoors to stay safe and to practice social distancing. Many firms stopped their activities to control the spread of the virus and recommended remote work.

Experts in economics are suspecting another economic recession even harsher than the Great Depression of 1929. Despite the fact many governors from different spots in the world made huge efforts to cope with the new situation that the Coronavirus pandemic has resulted in—by encouraging remote work and adopting social distancing—many individuals have unfortunately lost their jobs or their income has been reduced. Some firms, however, have not stopped working despite the pandemic, and companies that benefited from this situation: IT companies that enhanced networking and also companies that produce masks and hydro alcoholic gels. The U.S. government's reaction to the pandemic has been unique as Trump blamed China for the spread of the pandemic instead of looking for pragmatic solutions. He called the virus "Chinese Virus" simply because it appeared in China. This period of Covid-19 has been marked by the 2020 U.S. presidential elections and the victory of the Democratic Party under the leadership of Joe Biden (We will tackle the difference between Biden's strategies and Trump's in dealing with the pandemic and their reaction to the economic crisis in a separate paper).

II. Conclusion

Welfare (which refers to public assistance programs) has been shaped by stigma and stereotypes. It is very important to bear in mind that not only the poor have been benefiting from welfare. (Abramovitz, 2001, p. 297) The U.S. government helps also middle-class and upper-class families. (Abramovitz, 2001, p.299) In other words, "social welfare programs serving the middle class and upper classes receive more government funding, pay higher benefits, and face fewer budget cuts than programs serving poor people." (Abramovitz, 2001, p. 299). Thus, the perception of welfare in the United States (that welfare benefits only the "welfare queens") is irrational and it has been, to some extent, manipulated by the media and by some politicians who tend to blame poor people for benefiting from welfare to become richer and richer.

During the Trump era, welfare targeted people who did not need any government assistance. During the Covid-19 pandemic, new challenges have emerged and the future of the welfare state is between the Democrats' hands since, again, Democrats have returned to the political scene with the election of Joe Biden. We will tackle the evolution of welfare (public assistance programs) and the U.S. welfare state during the present times in another project.

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