

# RISING STREAMS OF NATIONALISM AND THE RETREAT OF INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENT: AN EXAMINATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF HYPER-NATIONALIST ELEMENTS IN THE CLIMATE POLITICS OF THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY

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## ABSTRACT

The first years of the Trump presidency have exhibited provocative interactions with global issues, particularly that of climate change. The globality of climate change has necessitated international cooperation. On the other hand, Trump's politics and rhetoric have indicated an inward nationalist turn. This article examines how different streams of nationalism interact with climate change debates in the U.S. political arena. Nationalism diverges in many ways, but it is elements of hypernationalism, it will be argued, that have the greatest influence on the climate politics of the Trump presidency, and partisan party-allegiances in the bipartisan political system of the United States are what ultimately perpetuate public attitudes on climate change itself.

Keywords: Nationalism, Hyper-Nationalism, Trump, Climate Politics, Globalization

## INTRODUCTION

In June 2017, Donald Trump announced that he would be withdrawing the United States from the Paris Agreement, a major global accord that called for mitigating climate change, predominantly by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The Paris Agreement is an international agreement that requires national action – signatory countries must cooperate to limit global warming by adopting low greenhouse gas emissions development and reporting efforts to reduce national emissions.<sup>1</sup> The underscoring component of the agreement is that a reduction in national greenhouse gas emissions would contribute to the worldwide reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions, allowing for a global peak of greenhouse gas emissions to become thing of the past. The very nature of this international agreement hinges on national action, as states are to hold themselves responsible for their own conduct when it comes to emissions within their domain – this evident from emphasis placed by the United

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<sup>1</sup> An English language text of the Paris Agreement can be downloaded from the website of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) secretariat: [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english\\_paris\\_agreement.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf)

Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) on nationally determined contributions—more commonly referred to as NDCs—which are seen to be “the heart of the agreement” (United Nations Climate Change, 2018). It is important to consider the absence of binding targets, which were a core component of the Kyoto Protocol, the landmark international treaty that set the legal precedent for international cooperation on climate change. Regarding its targets, the Kyoto Protocol is considered a failure (Rosen 2015; Brandt and Svendsen 2002). A major criticism of the treaty is the lack of consideration it gave to industry interests in cost-effectiveness and efficiency, and the binding targets have been seen as inflexible at best (Philibert 2004, 314 and 319). With no binding targets in the Paris Agreement, however, the reliability of world leaders and their pledges for national action is essential, as is national consensus – neither can be seen in the United States, as Trump’s reliability has repeatedly been viewed as questionable and polarization on the debate on climate change, particularly whether or not it is anthropogenic, continues to increase on a political and societal level as divisions in the bipartisan politics of the country appear to deepen. Moreover, the Trump administration’s attitudes towards climate politics (or lack thereof)<sup>2</sup> are emboldened by hyper-nationalist elements, a factor that perpetuates hyper-nationalist tendencies in much of the Republican-allied public.

There are political and societal divisions coming to the fore in Trump’s United States – divisions that can categorically be positioned as different to administrations of the recent past. Since the post-war period, the United States has been vocal about its leadership of the world, and rhetorics of American exceptionalism<sup>3</sup> have been repeatedly employed in U.S. political discourse, both for national and international audiences. To be sure, this in itself is not particularly different under the recent administration; after all, Trump began his inauguration address by thanking “fellow Americans” and the “people of the world” (Trump, January 20, 2017). Divisions differ,

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<sup>2</sup> Despite the absence of U.S. climate policy and the hesitance of Republican party to use the words climate change explicitly, it is climate politics I prefer using as this article is exclusively in the context of climate change.

<sup>3</sup> *American exceptionalism* is a term that refers to the perception or to ideologies that the United States is unique in the world in comparison to other countries or nations, often specifically in its history and attitudes towards freedom and democracy. Notable works on this include: Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double Edged Sword* (New York: Norton, 1996); *America Different?: A New Look at American Exceptionalism*, ed. Byron E. Shafer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Phillips Bradley, trans. Henry Reeve (New York: Knopf, 1948): 36-37; Deborah Madsen, *American Exceptionalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998); Joseph Lepgold and Timothy McKeown, “Is American Foreign Policy Exceptional? An Empirical Analysis,” *Political Science Quarterly* 110, no. 3 (1995): 369-384.

however, in the framing of the relationship between national economy and climate change mitigation, as Trump and his administration position them as diametrical opposites. Climate change, whether anthropogenic or not, seems to be largely ignored when approaching intersecting topics of industry, employment, or trade; if it is considered, it is from a skeptical mindset (Freudenburg and Muselli 2012, 784; McCright 2016, 83). This, in turn, is reflected in societal divisions, as partisan perspectives on climate change are split amongst both politicians and their constituents (McCright 2003, 354). For affirmers of climate change and actions towards mitigation, there are visible tendencies towards post-national citizenship and for skeptics it seems that an elevated love of the country through its economy that is positioned as a priority.

Climate change is a unique issue in its intrinsic globality. Approaches to the importance of climate change mitigation can be demonstrative of nationalist attitudes in the context of an increasingly connected international community, and this is especially relevant to the political atmosphere of the United States in the Trump era. The strengthening of U.S. economy and the importance of industry continue to be cornerstones of the Republican platform, but these issues have taken an increasingly nationalist tone under Trump. Other major topics since the 2016 presidential election have often been concerned with national borders, such as immigration reform and border control between the United States and Mexico (Pew Research Center, July 7, 2016, 31-39; Andrews and Kaplan 2015). While industry, economy, and immigration are issues that can be framed within national borders, climate change simply cannot. Climate does not adhere to national borders and cannot be approached with a border mentality. Transnational thinking and post-national perspectives are essential in this regard. Many U.S. perspectives, however, are turning inwards, and signals of hyper-nationalism have been appearing in discourses related to prioritizing the nation.

This article will examine rising elements of nationalism in the context of perspectives on and approaches to climate change mitigation in the United States since the rise of Donald Trump as a leading political figure. A central question to this discussion is: How do different streams of nationalism shape climate politics in the United States, particularly throughout the first years of the Trump presidency? Trump's political rhetoric of putting "America First" has not only undermined burgeoning U.S. cooperation with the international community on climate change, but has also had

notable influences on climate change perspectives in U.S. society. The dichotomy of climate change affirmers and skeptics is embedded with varying nationalist elements, and elements of post-nationalism and hyper-nationalism are two that can, respectively, be paired with this dichotomy. In Trump's politics, it is the hyper-nationalist that dominates climate politics, particularly as his administration appears to lean towards climate skepticism. In examining the intersections between nationalist elements, Trump's climate politics, and attitudes towards climate change, a brief foray into a history of globalization and nationalism in the United States will first be taken, followed by a short but relevant outline of different streams of nationalism and how they are perpetuated – these sections are imperative to contextualize the contemporary history of this article, as they ground my examination of nationalism and climate politics during the Trump presidency in both a conceptual and historical framework. It will then be necessary to examine the climate politics in the United States, particularly in relation to the nationalist elements that shape attitudes towards climate change, as well the bipartisan political system of the United States and its role in perpetuating perspectives on climate change mitigation. These discussions will be framed around Trump's announcement of U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and general themes prevalent in Trump's political rhetoric since his election to demonstrate that even his brand of nationalism does not function as a monolith. Indeed, the varying nationalistic strains in the United States reflected in political discourse and its public influence can be used to examine deepening national divisions in the framework of an intrinsically global issue.

#### GLOBALIZATION AND NATIONALISM IN THE UNITED STATES, BEFORE AND UNDER TRUMP

Globalization has historically been intertwined with capitalism and as the inevitable result of free market economics. It is also used as a conceptual framework to explain how the world's economic and social relations have developed since the growth of cross-border networks of exchange (Hodson 2000, 103). The flow of people, goods and services, and information and ideas across borders has raised necessary questions about the development and state of national cultures and identities, as homogenization, polarization, and hybridity are often connected to not only a global culture, but also to

what scholars such as Mel van Elteren refer to as the *Americanization* of the world (Elteren 2006). The use of the term *Americanization* when referring to the solely the United States further demonstrates the hegemonic influence of the country in global culture, particularly as the Americas consist of numerous countries, none of which are referred to as America in colloquial English except the United States.

Moreover, internationality was already deep-seated in the establishment of the United States as an independent country. Joel Hodson argues that the United States was global before it was national since its establishment as a state came after waves of transoceanic migration from various origins and its growth was based on international trade due to its historical connection to a colonial system (Hodson 2000, 105-106). Before the United States established itself as an autonomous nation, it was a product of global processes and movements which became inherent to its national identity (Hodson 2000, 107). But this was also problematic in the definition of national identity, since its population diversity meant that it was not composed of a single majority ethnicity, religion, or origin. The United States, then, was a model of a nation composed of a multicultural society united by shared common national values, such as freedom and liberty (Hodson 2000, 108). These shared values are a core of national U.S. identity today, and this is demonstrated by the importance of the national anthem and gathering around the U.S. flag on Independence Day. More specifically, these values are codified in the so-called American Creed, the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, by Thomas Jefferson: “. . . all men . . . are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (Stimson 2004, 76).

In the centuries following the Declaration of Independence, the pursuit of happiness, became increasingly dependent on material comforts, while life in United States became increasingly intertwined with international trade. This interdependence came to the forefront during the oil crises of the 1970s, early in which the Arab oil embargo demonstrated that the United States was not the sole determiner of the American way of life – being cut-off from Middle Eastern oil resulted in both an economic downturn as well as major petroleum shortages for the both the industry as well as the average consumer. The United States also experienced its first trade deficit in a century in the 1970s, and by the end of the decade the deficit stood at about \$30

billion. U.S. businesses responded by restructuring corporate entities and relocating labor-expensive jobs out of the country to cheaper locations abroad (Hodson 2000, 121). Oil prices declined quickly after the energy crisis of the 1970s; harder times were soon forgotten, and labor-cheap but energy-expensive industrial activity once again was heavily encouraged.<sup>4</sup> In terms of trade and commerce, it became clear that the United States was an agent of globalization. The ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) further promoted tariff-free trade between the United States, Canada, and Mexico, extending the freedoms businesses had in relocating labor and production related jobs to cheaper locations. Employment became a staple in U.S. discourses on American-ness. Trade continued to flow across borders and jobs moved south, perpetuating the growth of a managerial class in employment and augmenting class differences in society. As the U.S. share of global manufacturing decreased, the gap in average income continued to widen (Hodson 2000, 123; Spence, Katz, and Lawrence 2011, 170; Bachman 2017).

Economy, domestic production, and employment, the latter primarily in connection to jobs and domestic production, are issues that continue to dominate U.S. consciousness today, and were used by Trump as justifications why the U.S. should withdraw from the Paris agreement. In his announcement in June 2017, Trump argued that the Paris Agreement was to the detriment of the U.S. economy and the U.S. working class:

The Paris climate accord is simply the latest example of Washington entering into an agreement that disadvantages the United States to the exclusive benefit of other countries, leaving American workers—who I love—and taxpayers to absorb the cost in terms of lost jobs, lower wages, shuttered factories, and vastly diminished economic production. (Trump, June 1, 2017)

Trump has repeatedly pledged to rebuilt the U.S. economy, and in doing so has simplified a complex history of international job relocation as justification for U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. This same rhetoric was essential to his presidential campaign – one that was run on presumptions of U.S. national identity.

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<sup>4</sup> An example of this is the energy plan Ronald Reagan presented as part of his national energy strategy. See United States Department of Energy, *Securing America's Energy Future: The National Energy Policy Plan* (Springfield: National Technical Information Service, 1981), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=inu.30000043810740;view=1up;seq=3>.

These politics are a stark contrast to those of his predecessor. Barack Obama signed the Paris Agreement on November 4, 2016 – what was one of his last major actions as president symbolized the attitudes taken by his administration towards issues that would be addressed in a drastically different manner by Trump. There are a handful of overarching global challenges that Obama took action on which Trump spent his first year in office critiquing and attempting to dismantle, and climate policy is just one of them. This contrast is representative of the political reputations of two presidents: America with the world<sup>5</sup> versus America First.

“America First” became a crowing call of both Trump’s election campaign and a phrase often used by the Trump administration; it is present when both Trump and Scott Pruitt—the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administrator—discussed why the United States must withdraw from the Paris Agreement:

[Trump] The Paris Agreement handicaps the United States economy . . . They don’t put America first. I do, and I always will.

[Pruitt] Your decision today to exit the Paris accord reflects your unflinching commitment to put America first. . . . today you’ve put America first with regard to international agreements and the environment. (Trump, June 1, 2017)

The phrase “America First,” along with “Make America Great Again” were rhetorical cornerstones of Trump’s 2016 election campaign as well as Trump’s inaugural address in January 2017, the latter of which emphasized that for Trump, “it’s going to be only America first” and that he would be a people’s president, highlighting the unity of U.S. citizens, with whom he would “make America great again” (Trump, January 20, 2017). It was, however, clear that those who may have been considered Americans by his predecessor would not necessarily be considered true Americans by him. The unity he spoke of was not for all. Throughout his campaign, he repeatedly raised the idea of national security being threatened by personified threats: one speech perpetuated the image of Mexican immigrants as criminals and rapists and another portrayed Muslims

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<sup>5</sup> Obama’s iconic speech, delivered in Berlin in July 2008, was titled “A World that Stands as One” and focused on international unity, particularly when it came to imminent dangers that could not be contained by national borders (Croucher 2018, 204). More specific, in this regard, to climate change were Obama’s remarks in Paris at the first session of the Paris Agreement negotiations, that repeatedly referred to his various visits, past and planned, to other countries and affirmations of U.S. commitment to international cooperation on mitigating climate change; see Barack Obama, “Remarks by President Obama at the First Session of COP21,” *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change* (2015), [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/cop21cmp11\\_leaders\\_event\\_usa.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/cop21cmp11_leaders_event_usa.pdf); for further analysis, see Robert Falkner, “The Paris Agreement and the New Logic of International Climate Politics,” *International Affairs* 92, no. 5 (2016): 1111.

as inhabitants unable to assimilate in the United States (Croucher 2018, 112). Immigration became a major issue both during the campaign and the first year of his presidency, with the purported “Muslim ban” and a refugee policy prioritizing Christians (Croucher 2018, 113), a proposed wall built along the U.S.-Mexican border to block migration into the United States from Mexico (Martin 2017, 15-17), and an attempted overturn of Obama’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals act (S. M. 2018).

Trump’s election campaign was deemed as populist by much mainstream media.<sup>6</sup> It is important here, thus, to distinguish between populism and nationalism but also, for the sake of my argument and to connect Trump’s voter appeal with his approach to policy, to highlight the overlap between the two. Populism is often seen as antithetical to the establishment and not in the context of any specific political ideas; it is in the sense of an attitude and associated with emotions of frustration, resentment, and anger. Criticism of elites is a necessary element along with antipluralism, so populism has to do with the representation of certain groups and not a broad constituency. Moreover, populism and populists claim to have the moral high ground, painting their opposition as corrupt and immoral (Müller 2017, 1-3). Nationalism, meanwhile, has to do with prioritizing the value of the nation-state above all else, and particularly in the West, sees the nation-state as the embodiment of honorable values that are liberal, democratic, and good. There are different strains of nationalism, such as civic nationalism, which connects nationality with citizenship, and ethnic nationalism, which connects nationality with biological necessity and bloodlines (Scott 2015). Francis Fukuyama has defined what has emerged with the Trump presidency as populist nationalism. According to Fukuyama, this has to do with the reversal of liberal economics and politics – economics that encourage an open global economy and politics by way of international trade agreements and institutions, such as NAFTA and the World Trade Organization, and politics that promote the build-up of international alliances such as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Essential to both was the role of the United States as the world’s leading liberal democracy (Fukuyama 2018, 7). Trump’s announcement of U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement embodies this trend

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<sup>6</sup> For some examples, see: David A. Graham, “The Paradox of Trump’s Populism,” *The Atlantic*, June 29, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/06/the-paradox-of-trumps-populism/564116/> or Francis Wilkinson, “Why Donald Trump Really Is A Populist,” *Bloomberg*, February 16, 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-02-16/why-donald-trump-really-is-a-populist>.



reversal; while the withdrawal has not formally taken place yet, Trump's rhetoric announcing it contains several sentiments that are not only populist nationalist by Fukuyama's definition, but also hyper-nationalist in its intent.

#### STREAMS OF NATIONALISM – DIVERGENCE AND PERPETUATION

Fukuyama's populist nationalism is evident in Trump's strategy for public support, but there are other nationalistic streams that must also be examined. Specifically in the context of climate politics – whether they are termed as such by the leadership or not – there exist recognizable elements of hyper- and post-nationalism. Climate change, being an intrinsically global issue, has a tendency in the United States to be denied by those who lean right socially and politically and hold tradition and the maintaining the American way of life—as they know it—as ideological priorities (Collomb 2014, 17) and affirmed by those who have an inclination towards post-national citizenship (Croucher 2018, 203-205).

The term post-nationalism emerged in the 1990s, and according to Arjun Appadurai has to do with “organizational forms [that are] more diverse, more fluid, more ad hoc, more provisional, less coherent, less organized, and simply less implicated in the comparative advantages of the nation-state” (Appadurai 1996, 160). Appadurai, here, identifies supra-national organizations that work above the operational scope of nation-states as essential to post-nationalism; in line with this, the secretariat for the UNFCCC embodies the post-national characteristics of a supra-national organization. The implication here for a national state is that in working with these organizations, the nation-state takes on an institutional role rather than the governing role it may be more traditionally used to. The secretariat for the UNFCCC, in this regard, is responsible for facilitating negotiations for the Paris Agreement, and exists as a supranational body which the United States must negotiate through, rather than simply speak through, on international climate agreements. The post-nationality of this relationship, then, is at odds with the hyper-national elements of Trump's climate politics. Post-nationalism itself, however, is also reflected in U.S. identity, particularly considering its long global history. The United States, as a self-identified land built by immigrants, is a diasporic community. Civic unity aside, it is not necessarily one of a unified national identity. In

the era of post-nationalism, migrants come to the United States seeking fortune but no longer wish to leave their homeland, or their national identity, behind (Appadurai 1996, 172). An example of this is the hyphenation of identity, such as Italian-American or Asian-American vs. American, the latter a national determinant often more visible in the American right, and arguably the American white.

Nationalism has diversified with the varying composition of states, with civic nationalism nestling itself in nations comprised of multiple ethnicities. Nevertheless, the nationalism that contributed to major wars in Europe in the twentieth century has left the word associated with racial, and often negative, connotations. Today, with the varying prefixation of the word, hyper-nationalism can be most closely used to define the nationalism of those wars. A key difference to highlight between nationalism and hyper-nationalism is that while nationalists believe that their nation is unique, they do not necessarily hold it as superior in comparison to other nations (Gellner 2006, 1-8). Hyper-nationalism, on the other hand, is the belief that other nations are inferior and that they pose a threat that must be dealt with. It is attributed to be a causal factor of the two world wars in pre-1945 Europe, second to the character and distribution of military power between the states. Leading up to and during these wars, hyper-nationalism was used by political elites to mobilize public support for alleged national defense efforts (Mearsheimer 1998, 10; Murray 2011, 309). Writing at the start of the second World War, Joseph Sydney Werlin delineated hyper-nationalism as nationalism existing “through the instinct of self-preservation” (307), and as “transforming economics into a handmaiden of politics” (308). These delineations are visible in Trump’s politics, in his insistence on “America First” when it comes to negotiating international trade and his use of economy and job creation as rhetorical platform cornerstones.

In comparing histories, bloodlines or ethnicity have never been the primary uniting national element in the United States (T. A. 2018). Yet, there indeed was once a time in the United States when people believed only specific ethnicities, namely those that were white and originated from Northern Europe, were the true Americans (Lieven 2012, 88). This changed legally with the 1965 amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which repealed the national origins quota system (Chin 1996, 276). Still, by and large the nationalism of the United States was that of a civic sort,

based on shared values and often aligned with principles of supranational inclusivity and the values of internationalism. The rising nationalist sentiment in the Trump's United States, however, can be and have indeed been described as hyper-national – while they have long existed in U.S. society, under Trump they have risen to the surface in a resounding clash against post-national attitudes. The Economist, as one example, described Trump's America as angry, and as one of a new nationalism with pessimistic undertones that produces intolerance and becomes increasingly inward looking (The Economist 2016). An article in the Financial Times drew pronounced parallels between Trump's brand of nationalism and the far-right in Europe (Rachman 2018). In *The Atlantic*, Peter Beinart described Trump as “an unpatriotic hyper-nationalist” (Beinart 2018). Trump's nationalism, however, is different from dominant historical streams as it is based on exclusivity and seeks to withdraw the United States from its traditional role in global leadership.

Trump's nationalism, unlike that of previous Presidents, is globally considered as a hyper-nationalism which is more inward-orientated and is least interested in global inclusivity, international totality and multilateral entirety, and which is said to be unfavorable for the globalism, internationalism and supra-nationalism of which the United States of America has not only been global propagator but also international advocator and that is also why, probably, America's global leadership potentiality has been widely acknowledged all over the World. (Ateeque 2018, 82-83)

Trump has not, and likely will not, isolate the United States completely. Globalization is not new, and in light of post-national trade alliances the United States would not survive if hyper-national attitudes became the norm, particularly in relation to economics and trade. However, striking elements of the hyper-national have become evident in Trump's United States, and these are discernable in contemporary climate change discourses. The United States has a decidedly low climate performance in comparison to other industrialized countries, which is all the more alarming considering it consistently ranks amongst the highest consumers of energy, both on an average and per capita basis (United States Energy Information Administration 2018).

## THE POLARIZATION OF CLIMATE POLITICS – THE INFLUENCE OF NATIONALIST ELEMENTS IN INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

Despite the intrinsic globality of climate change issues, recognizing and adapting the structure of international systems is often not considered as an agent of mitigation or change. Rather, it is national strategy and action that are championed as change-makers in international climate accords such as the Paris Agreement. It is for this reason that scholars such as Thomas Pogge believe that such international agreements are doomed to failure, as a sole focus on national action ignores the structural international developments that have resulted in an energy-intensive global society which has arguably permutated climate (Pogge 2008, 147). States are inextricably engaged in a global economy through international institutions like the World Trade Organization, which encourage international trade and economic growth. These, however, come at a climate cost, as promoting greater trade worldwide and economic growth requires more natural resources and an ever-increasing use of energy, of which fossil fuels continues to be an essential. Higher emissions from greater fossil fuel use, which continues to be the most consumed energy, is an inevitable result, exacerbating rather than mitigating climate change (Caney 2006, 747). In this regard, calling for the implementation of climate change mitigation, particularly through a reduction in emissions as mandated by the Paris agreement, is impossible on national levels.

These factors may or may not be recognized by the U.S. administration, but regardless, climate change mitigation is a contentious issue in the United States. This was demonstrated early on with the Kyoto Protocol – the treaty entered force in February 2005 without the ratification of the United States (Hovi, Skodvin, and Andresen 2003). However, though the United States was not a signatory party, there have been several attempts to introduce climate legislation on a federal level, particularly in relation to reducing emissions (Fisher, Leifeld, and Yoko 2013, 524). But despite the prevalence of climate change discourse in U.S. politics, the United States has never had a national climate policy. This is largely because the issue is a deeply polarizing one, which is particularly affecting considering the bipartisan nature of U.S. politics. There have been several studies as to why this is. Aaron McCright and Riley Dunlap have found that conservative think tanks are major influencers on policy-making – in terms of climate change policy, they have been a successful deterrent

(McCright and Dunlap 2003). Some researchers have found that congressional hearings on climate change have a higher potential of occurrence in Democrat-controlled sessions over Republican-controlled sessions (Park, Xinsheng, and Vedlitz 2010). Democrats, in this regard, also have more testimonies from pro-environmental political actors and scientists engaged in mainstream publications. Republicans, on the other hand, have a higher rate of testimonies from people in business or industry sectors, and the content of these testimonies have a higher likelihood of challenging climate change science and highlighting the negative economic effects of climate change policy (Fisher, Leifeld, and Iwaki 2013; Park, Xinsheng, and Vedlitz 2010). This is particularly interesting, considering that studies conducted by the Pew Research Center show that scientific literacy does not strongly influence opinions on climate issues, demonstrating that members of neither party necessarily bases their climate politics on their understanding of scientific research related to climate change (Pew Research Center, October 4, 2016). Perhaps a reason for this lies in the theory that political liberals, like the Democrats, are more open to critically assessing the established order while political conservatives, like the Republicans, tend to justify the existing system (Feygina, Jost, and Goldsmith 2010, 328). A more tangible reason, though, is the important role played by business and industry actors. The polarization of climate politics, particularly in the context of climate change ideologies, often has to do with funding. Justin Farrell argues that campaigns to spread climate change skepticism, often through the production of alternative discourses, are well-funded and well-planned, and that lobbying firms working for corporations, industry groups, and other related associations are who often carry out these campaigns. The polarization these campaigns contribute to increasing public uncertainty on the issue (Farrel 2016, 92-93).

Uncertainty regarding climate change typically stems from the intangibility of the issue as climate history is beyond the scope of historical observations and human impact on climactic systems and on the trajectory of climate change are unpredictable (Weber and Stern 2011, 316). In line with this, a major challenge for climate change affirmers is that climate change impacts are both physically and temporally remote for most Americans (Albertson and Gadarian 2015, 30). According to Anthony Giddens, that the dangers posed by climate change aren't tangible or visible in the daily life of most Americans affects nearly every element of response to climate change concerns. Not

only is it inherent to climate change skepticism, it is also the reason that even climate change affirmers are not willing to alter their lives significantly as a mitigation strategy. Amongst political elites, it results in grand-sounding strategies that are missing practical content (Giddens 2011, 2-4). Such are the criticisms that have been levelled against the Paris Agreement as well as Democrat climate initiatives in the United States.<sup>7</sup>

Recognition of climate change by Americans has been considerable, but polls have found that there is a significant difference in how strongly scientists and non-scientists view climate change, particularly in an anthropogenic sense. In comparison to other signatory states of the Paris Agreement such as Canada, Germany, and Italy, where between 59%-65% of the public affirm their belief that climate change is anthropogenic, only 49% of the U.S. public affirm this belief. Uncertainty based on lack of scientific evidence or application of conventional understanding is a factor here, but another major one that is unique to the United States are the well-funded and organized climate change skepticism campaigns (Weber and Stern 2011, 317). Moreover, surveys of Americans have shown that while it is an important issue amongst environmental issues, it is typically considered secondary to economic and national security issues. This has to do with the bipartisan system as well, which is particularly relevant in the face of developing energy policy and supporting research for alternative energies. It has become more evident that Democrats and Republicans take different approaches to energy policy in the context of climate change. In 2012, for example, the Republican party advocated for increasing domestic production of natural gas and oil and decreasing EPA regulations without explicitly mentioning climate change, while the Democratic platform used climate change science as an argument for reducing emissions and increasing alternative energy use – these policies were framed respectively as supportive of the U.S. economy and protective of the environment (Albertson and Gadarian 2015, 111).

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<sup>7</sup> For some examples, see: Robison Meyer, "Is Hope Possible After the Paris Agreement," *The Atlantic*, December 12, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2015/12/can-we-hope-after-the-paris-agreement/420174/>; David Roberts, "No Country on Earth is taking the 2 Degree Climate Target Seriously," *Vox*, April 29, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2016/10/4/13118594/2-degrees-no-more-fossil-fuels>; Amy Harder, "What Liberals Get Wrong about Climate Change," *Axios*, August 21, 2017, <https://www.axios.com/what-liberals-get-wrong-about-climate-change-1513304923-7409357f-2200-4853-ada8-be27868d2b6e.html>.

It is also imperative to take into account the production of knowledge as the landscape of media continues to fragment and boundaries between truth and falsehood become increasingly blurred. Scholars like Joshua Busby have argued that mass-public attitudes are deeply influenced by how much information has been received by the public while being shaped by elites, and when an opinion is polarized along party lines in the U.S. bipartisan system, people are more likely to adhere to the position of the political party they feel aligned with. In these issues, the elites who persuade the people are politicians rather than scientists (Busby 2017, 1004). This is particularly important in the context of climate change discourse, largely due to the prevalence of misinformation of the public. While the majority of the scientific community has reached consensus on the existence of climate change, the United States public is increasingly polarized. A Pew poll from 2010 showed that only 16 per cent of Republican voters agreed that climate change is real, caused by human activity, and dangerous when compared to over 50 percent of Democrat voters (Giddens 2011, 89-90). Naomi Oreske and Erik Conway have written on how disinformation campaigns against the scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change have been successful in political polarization as well as in limiting societal engagement (Oreskes and Conway 2011, 232-241), and that politicizing science has been able to delay climate change policy in the United States. Some scholars have also argued that people's beliefs are often in line with identity-protective motivated reasoning, but that political polarization on climate change is, regardless, more likely to be a result of selective exposure to partisan media, and in this regard it is the Republican-aligned public that is far more likely to abject to scientific consensus in the face of counter messages (Van der Linden et al. 2017, 5). Interestingly then, the issue shifts into no longer being truly divided into affirmation of skepticism. A study by Leaf Van Boven, Phillip Ehret, and David Sherman showed that it is not affirmation or skepticism that informs climate policy, but the values each party associates it most strongly with. Boven, Ehret, and Sherman found that generally, both Democrats and Republicans are in general agreement about the reality of anthropogenic climate change, but generally supported policies that were associated with each party's, and historically these parties tended to disagree. Bipartisan disagreement overruled any shared opinions on climate change mitigation, and this, in turn, influenced public

opinion – republican constituents agreed with the Republican platform, and Democrat constituents with the Democrat platform (Van Boven, Ehret, and Sherman. 2018).

It is important to recognize the power of the individual as civil society and the long-term perspectives of standout individuals have to potential to spark major change both domestically and internationally (Giddens 2011, 5-6), but if the individuals constituting the greater U.S. public are blinded by partisanship, then change is hardly likely to come from the bottom up. If support for major issues is perpetuated by party allegiances rather than policy stances, it seems that effective climate policy will not be a priority under a Republican administration. At least according to Trump's prevalent political rhetoric, it is economy that needs significant attention first. Pre-occupation with economic growth drastically impacts the way nations deal with environmental concerns, and this is no different with climate change. While states are exerting pressure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to prevent the potential of a future climate catastrophe, they also need to support industry and business to create jobs and provide income to their citizens and inhabitants (Anwar and Sam 2012, 40). This was addressed by Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which was passed in February 2009 – a primary goal was transitioning to clean energy, and a cornerstone of doing so was investment in the creation of green jobs (Konisky and Woods 2016, 371). What has emerged under Trump, however, is a dichotomy of economic nationalism and eco-nationalism on both ends. The question of prioritization has yet to be addressed: to what scale can emissions reduction balance the state of industry and jobs?

There are cases to be made for economic nationalism, particularly in the context of globalization. In Trump's United States we can see a struggle between liberal trade and populist nationalism, particularly in the context of international relations. What Trump supporters find is missing for the former seems to be present for the latter: viable politics (Mason 2017, 32). Populist movements, particularly those where we see elements of hyper-nationalism, are largely defined around opposing the free movement of people and are not often seen in left-leaning politics. In the United States, where many socialist and labor movements come from other countries, radical politics often follow periods of high migration (Mason 2017, 29). This can certainly be considered in the rise in anti-immigrant rhetoric regarding, for one, migration into the United States from the south through Mexico. At the same time, the United States is said to have experienced a



decrease in international trade over the last decade when compared to the 1990s or the 2000s, and much of U.S. production and consumption is within national borders (Mason 2017, 30). Seemingly, the United States is attempting to assert its capability of self-sustenance, but it is also attempting to create barriers against external pressures. Historically, U.S. leadership has openly affirmed its position as a world leader and guide, but under Trump it seems it seems to retreat from any responsibility it may have previously taken in international issues. In this regard, it must also be considered that when Trump announced U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, he referred explicitly to “the Green Climate Fund, which is costing the United States a vast fortune” (Trump, June 1, 2017). The Green Climate Fund’s stated objective is to provide financial support to assist developing countries to incorporate low-emission and climate-resilient economies in development and economic growth (Green Climate Fund, n.d.). The Green Climate Fund, for Trump, is a redistribution of U.S. wealth, and he argues that “under the Paris accord, billions of dollars that ought to be invested right here in America will be sent to the very countries that have taken our factories and our jobs away from us” (Trump, June 1, 2017). Trump, in positioning the recipients of money as takers of U.S. jobs, vilifies other countries and elevates the status of the United States, a hyper-nationalist tendency of viewing a personified other as a hostile threat to an innocent good.

## CONCLUSION

Trump has manifested hyper-nationalist elements into repeated declarations of strengthening the economy and creating more jobs in the United States, both of which have become cornerstones of his politics and his platform for public appeal. Money and jobs are tangible elements easy for the layman to understand, and both are deemed necessary for the U.S. brand of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (Stimson 2004, 76). By positioning climate change mitigation in opposition to these material factors, Trump has created a dichotomy where they cannot co-exist. In this dichotomy, withdrawal from the Paris agreement becomes necessary for the United States to have a strong economy and enough jobs to ensure a satisfactory standard of living for its population. In the larger picture Trump portrays, the United States must not

compromise its national values to contribute to what the international community decides is necessary for a global good.

It is clear that the United States is not, in fact, united in their support of Trump. The bipartisan political system demands a societal divide which readily applies itself to climate politics: the Democrat constituents support what the Democrats advocate for, and the Republican constituents support what the Republicans advocate for. This perpetuates partisan attitudes on climate change, which filters down from political leadership to create societal factions. Blind partisan support bolsters uninformed attitudes on climate change, where people—both in politics and society—advocate the perspective of the party they feel most allied to, rather than creating one based on individual research or scientific consensus. This, combined with the hyper-national elements of Trump's climate politics, creates a breeding ground for the potency of misinformation.

Examining the intersections between nationalism and climate politics is especially important in the United States, where withdrawal from the international community seems to be taking place in issues where national action and accountability is of particular relevance. There is much more that needs to be explored on this subject, such as the dynamics between post-nationalism and hyper-nationalism in U.S. climate politics and policy-making, or the potential longevity of Trump as a Republican leader and his politics in the United States. If partisanship has such deep-seated influence, wavering Republican commitment to a Republican president could produce fissures in both political and public attitudes towards climate change mitigation. In this regard, a contemporary historical analysis of the nuances in correlating political and public opinion swing patterns on climate change would be of utmost value. U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement is not yet in effect. But the symbolism of Trump's withdrawal announcement should not go unnoticed against the backdrop of inflating nationalist divergences in a country that has historically taken pride in rhetorics of national unity.

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