

# Trump and the Revolt of the ‘Somewheres’

By Christopher DeMuth; *The Wall Street Journal*, March 2, 2019



Trumpism has an essence, and that essence is nationalism. It is bigger than President Trump and certain to outlast his tenure in office.

Mr. Trump’s candidacy began as a furious attack on both the Democratic and Republican political establishments, and a vow to do something neither party had done recently—put “America first.” In both respects, his campaign and presidency have been strikingly similar to the nationalist movements in England and Europe, from Brexit to the euroskeptical governments in Poland, Hungary and Italy, to the neonationalist parties of Germany and France. In each case, the insurgents have claimed that their nation’s political and business leaders are part of an international elite that sacrifices national sovereignty in ways—from free trade and open immigration to murky treaties and remote bureaucracies—that harm many of their countrymen.

The harmed countrymen tend to be less-educated hinterlanders and members of the working class, who find representation in the nationalist movements. The

shocked establishments—incumbent politicians, government careerists, media figures, corporate executives and intellectuals—have responded in striking unison. The political arrivistes, they insist, are ill-informed populists, xenophobic if not racist, inflamed by irrational hatred of immigrants, exhibiting authoritarian tendencies. Europe’s leading internationalists, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron, have coordinated their actions and policies to keep the nationalist movements at bay. The synchronous counterattacks seem to validate the theory of a global elite.

These developments have scrambled partisan alignments. The new divide is conventionally described in economic or regional terms, but it is best understood as social and cultural. The British political analyst David Goodhart, in his superb book *The Road to Somewhere* (2017), describes the divide as the “Anywheres” versus the “Somewheres.”

The Anywheres are cosmopolitan, educated, mobile and networked. Their lives center on communities of affinity rather than locality—friends and colleagues who may be anywhere on a given day. Their attachments to place are secondary; they tend to regard national differences as quaint, borders as nuisances, divergent regulations as irrational. Their politics are liberal, whether progressive or classical. The Anywheres are generally wealthier than the Somewheres, but they include many people of moderate income, such as junior employees of government agencies, schools and nonprofits.

The Somewheres are rooted in local communities. Their jobs and weekends, their commitments and friendships and antagonisms, are part and parcel of their families, neighborhoods, clubs and congregations. Many work with their hands and on their feet. Whatever their partisan leanings, they tend to be socially conservative and patriotic and less disposed to vote with their feet.

These differences in circumstance and allegiance have been around for a while—at least since the appearance of commercial jet travel, easy long-distance communications and multinational corporations. The economic divide between those who did and did not graduate from college has been growing for decades. So why have the divisions burst on the political scene, across the advanced democracies, suddenly and by surprise, accompanied by angry polarization and sometimes violence, threatening serious instability?

I have an explanation based on my studies of regulation and the administrative state. An important cause of this turmoil is the decline of representative government, in which law is enacted by elected legislatures, and the rise of declarative government, in which law is dispensed by bureaucracies and courts.

In recent decades, the U.S. Congress has delegated its lawmaking powers: voting by lopsided margins for goals such as clean air and equality of the sexes, while leaving the hard choices—the real legislating—to specialized executive-branch agencies. Lawmakers have abandoned regular budgeting and appropriations, weakening the “power of the purse.” They have stood by passively, often with palpable relief, as courts have decreed resolutions of contentious issues of sexual autonomy and moral obligation that were previously matters for legislative deliberation. National legislatures in Europe and the U.K. have done the same thing, with the added twist that they have delegated considerable powers to the European Union’s supernational bureaucracies and courts.

The conventional criticism of these developments is that they evade democratic accountability and lead to overregulation and “agency capture” by interest groups. Administrative agencies can make rules—de facto laws—in much greater profusion than elected representatives. Agencies often go to extremes, or cut deals among insider groups, that could never survive a legislative vote. Delegation produces more law than most citizens want, and often objectively bad law. But bureaucrats cannot be voted out of office.

The nationalist insurgencies cast a new light on these issues. The administrative state has expanded since the early 1970s partly in response to rising affluence and high technology. In wealthy, educated societies, many more people have the time, interest and facility for politics, and they bring upscale concerns to the table. Jobs and economic welfare now jostle for attention with a multitude of new issues—personal health and safety, environmental quality, consumerism, and individual and group identity, dignity, lifestyle, discrimination and “access.” At the same time, modern communication technology has radically lowered the cost of political organization. The slightest complaint or enthusiasm can now find far-flung allies, achieve self-awareness as a political cause, and press its claims in the public square and in Congress.

Political aspirants and officeholders can now build their careers as solo entrepreneurs, by joining networks of ideological and economic interest. Party and

legislative hierarchs that had long disciplined political careers and platforms have lost their clout.

These trends have swamped Congress with demands for action that vastly exceed the capacities of legislative decision-making, with its internal conflicts and elaborate procedures. That has led Congress to delegate policy-making to missionary agencies that can proliferate without limit, and to give quiet thanks when courts take prickly issues off the legislative docket. But they have also produced an imbalance of influence. While society has become highly affluent, educated and networked in general, it has done so unevenly. Representative government suited the interests and values of Somewheres, while declarative government suits the interests and values of Anywheres.

The most educated, articulate, mobile and networked are well-positioned to influence the administrative state and the judiciary. They focus not on their own congressmen but on the agencies, and legislators from wherever, that specialize in the issues they follow. They think that policy should be determined by reason, science and expertise rather than legislative horse-trading and nose-counting. They themselves work in meritocracies—business, finance, the professions, universities, media and think tanks. Meritocracy, not democracy, justifies their power and the means by which they exercise it.

Those who are less educated, articulate, mobile and networked are more beholden to their representatives. They are attached to a locality, and no one champions local interests with the zeal and particularity of a congressman. One might think that national lobby groups and membership organizations would provide Somewheres with the means to influence the administrative state. But often they do not. Regulators at the Environmental Protection Agency, for instance, navigate around the positions of manufacturers, refiners, utilities, unions and environmental groups. They often give short shrift to local interests. Community solidarity is not part of any regulatory mission. Lost jobs may count as efficiencies in agencies' cost-benefit analyses.

Mr. Trump's two galvanizing issues, trade and immigration, have been matters of extreme policy delegation. Since the 1960s, trade agreements have been forged by executive officials in collaboration with business and union leaders, with Congress relegated to fast-track, up-or-down votes on the whole package. When President Obama took it upon himself to rewrite fundamental immigration policies in 2016, congressional opponents responded that they would forbid the changes with a rider

to the appropriations of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Then they discovered USCIS doesn't need congressional appropriations—it is funded by its own fees and other devices.

Beyond immigration and trade, Mr. Trump has made “deconstructing the administrative state” a priority. Similarly, Brexit proponents emphasize repatriating domestic lawmaking from the EU to Westminster, and the nationalist governments of Eastern Europe devote considerable energy to outfoxing their bureaucratic overlords in Brussels. Declarative government is adverse to nationalist constituencies in many different circumstances.

Imagine if, during the past several decades, government in the U.S., U.K. and Europe had continued to be dominated by national legislatures, with all the posturing, parochialism and muddled compromise that would have entailed. The march toward centralized EU government and a common currency, and toward executive and judicial government in the U.S., would have been much slower, more complicated and less highhanded than it was. The Anywheres would have had to accommodate the Somewheres at every incremental step. Each side would have won some and lost some. But the results, quite plausibly, would have been more stable and harmonious than where we have ended up—at rule-or-ruin precipices in nation after nation.

The great challenge now is to make productive use of the new spirit of nationalism and its political energies. The successful nation-state not only declares but cultivates its sovereignty, and that requires sustaining the allegiance of citizens and tangibly promoting their interests and well-being. It does not aggravate, but rather respects and builds upon, the parochial loyalties of its constituent tribes of community, locality, and ethnic, racial and religious identity. Americans have done this brilliantly through the centuries, but lately we seem to have lost the knack. In the wake of the Trump rebellion, we should aim to restore relatively stable political competition and mutual accommodation, inspired by a sense of common destiny—a more capacious nationalism.

That involves a revival of representative government. The legislature is where a nation's multifarious tribes accommodate one another, and where numbers and intensity count even when cogent rationalization is lacking. It is nice to say that the Anywheres, who depend on the Somewheres for daily necessities—household and transportation services, food—ought to be respectful of them in the political realm.

But the conflicts are genuine and wide-ranging. Congress is the only institution where they can come to terms.

The difficulty is that the social and technological developments that have cleaved our politics are the same ones that have sidelined Congress. Think tanks and advocacy groups bristle with programs on congressional reform—restoring annual budgeting and appropriations, strengthening committees and chairmen, revising internal rules such as the Senate filibuster, requiring votes on agency rules. Few members of Congress are interested in any of these excellent ideas. Most are content with affinity networking, agency lobbying and nonstop personal fundraising. Congressional reform will have to come from without.

The judiciary may lend a hand. Since the 1970s, the Supreme Court has given Congress increasingly free rein to delegate its powers to the executive and deferred extravagantly to agency interpretations of statutes and rules. It is beginning to reconsider those doctrines and may move toward greater constitutional discipline. That would oblige Congress to make more policy decisions itself, making American law more representative and less declarative.

Yet legislative revival involves many “political questions” that courts wisely avoid. The president is Congress’s political rival, but his interests often differ from those of the bureaucracy that nominally reports to him, and sharing responsibility with Congress on controversial matters can work to his advantage. A president committed to constitutional rebalancing could make a set of procedural promises in advance of individual policy battles—say, to submit all major new regulations to Congress for approval, or to refuse to sign budgetary “continuing resolutions” in place of regular appropriations.

Another outside force for a stronger Congress would be stronger political parties—with the wherewithal to select House and Senate candidates, bankroll their campaigns, announce election platforms and enforce legislative adherence to them. Such parties would be less in thrall to their tea-party and resistance wings. Under unified government, they could enact the promises that brought them to power; when government is divided, they could negotiate with each other from positions of strength.

These means to legislative restoration face institutional barriers that are worthy targets of nationalist energies. But even if successful, they will not be enough.

Congress at its best is a reactive body, devoted to managing the political inbox and parceling out benefits. It can do no more than moderate the passions that now beset us. Yet the sources of successful American nationhood are what they have always been—democratic equality, cultural pluralism, competitive enterprise, and freedom of opinion, inquiry and association. Sustaining them is inescapably a task for national leadership.

*Mr. DeMuth is a distinguished fellow at Hudson Institute. A longer version of this essay, "Trumpism, Nationalism and Conservatism," appears in the Winter issue of the Claremont Review of Books.*