

Donald Trump's Appeal: Is "Whitelash" an Adequate Explanation?

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Abstract

Scholars have expounded in diverse ways the rise of former US president Donald Trump. One proposition has been that his appeal to white middle-class people was successful. This concept connects to whitelash—the idea that there was a backlash against political liberalism, inclusiveness, and progressive politics from white people. However, this article demonstrates that whitelash does not provide an adequate explanatory framework to understand Trump's electoral victory. Rather, whitelash is merely one phenomenon leveraged by appealing to voters' whiteness through what is more accurately identified as right-wing populism. Moreover, relying on the concept of whitelash to explain the rise of former US president Donald Trump tends to ignore other issues regarding American democracy and the presidential elections of 2016. These include Trump's upper hand in election strategies, the poor record of the Clinton family, voter turnout, and wider critiques of democracy itself. While there is some value in using the concepts of whitelash and whiteness to assess Trump's presidency, replacing whitelash with different interpretive approaches extends a more robust and broader understanding of Trump's electoral victory.

Keywords

Whitelash; Donald Trump; Populism; Hillary Clinton; Democracy; Political Correctness

Introduction

The election of Donald Trump in 2016 has been an interesting research subject. Scholars offered various explanations of why Trump, with his controversial character, won the elections with minimal political experience. The interests stem from his explicitly divisionary claims, and an overall demeanor that is atypical of Republicans' "business as usual" (Embrick et al. 2020, 220). Some researchers explain it as a working-class feat, while others call it a conservative awakening (Bhambra 2017). An emergent interpretation of Trump's victory associates his success with a backlash from aggrieved white people—a concept that is commonly known as whitelash (Kellner 2017; Embrick et al. 2020). While the term whitelash is decades old, its use has increased substantially in the aftermath of Trump's election (Hughey 2022). For example, Terry Smith's book *Whitelash: Unmasking White Grievance at the Ballot Box* shows the weight of this phenomenon. Admittedly, Hughey's (2022)

review of it highlights that Smith's understanding of whitelash is in conjunction with populism. Nevertheless, populist cases were only identified in the context of whiteness. Lippard et al. (2020) also argue that whitelash played a role in electing Trump and claim that whitelash is as old as non-discriminatory civil rights.

Indeed, whitelash is associated with whiteness, where being white motivates certain actions (Ahmed 2007). McDermott and Ferguson's (2022) article highlights that many key political events associated with domestic politics, such as Trump's elections and its subsequent actions, have made whiteness more visible. Some scholars argue that whites hold such beliefs to the extent that they feel like the "principal victims of discrimination," replacing blacks (Scott and Andersen 2020, 414). Bhambra's (2017) work associates Trump's electoral victory with middle-class white people.

These various scholarly discussions suggest that whiteness has been a common theme among scholars in trying to understand Trump's success in the 2016 elections. However, researchers seem to be less in agreement around white Trump voters' class positioning. Moreover, while there is substantial scope for examining Trump's policies holistically, including an international relations view, from a whiteness perspective, this paper addresses only its domestic elements related to the 2016 electoral victory.

Without doubt, whitelash tenets are observable in Trump's electoral victory. However, the concept itself does not satisfactorily explain the political phenomena of Trump's successful election. Methodologically, the conceptualization of whitelash represents a form of face-value reading that lacks appropriate construct and external validity, which results in limited usefulness beyond Trump's political context and produces highly limited inferences (Drost 2011). Indeed, there are many difficulties in extrapolating case studies to external validity (Lijphart 2014). However, replacing whitelash with different interpretive approaches extends a more robust and broader understanding of Trump's electoral victory and similar victories globally.

In this paper, I first explore whitelash as a concept and capture how recent literature describes it. Secondly, I argue that whitelash does not adequately explain Trump's rise to power. I suggest three main arguments to support my thesis. Firstly, whitelash is only one tool in a larger populist warehouse. Secondly, Hillary Clinton's campaign and credibility were weak, leaving people to perceive Trump as the stronger option. Finally, Trump's electoral victory and broader political dynamics cannot be adequately understood and explained without also looking at voter turnout and democracy itself.

Whitelash

Whitelash is essentially a backlash from white people against the politics and cultures established by the Democratic Party, or the political liberals (Kellner 2017; Embrick et al. 2020). Kellner (2017) defines whitelash as “a rebellion of angry white people who were totally alienated from the established political system” against a culture of “political correctness that criticizes racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of bias” (138). Kellner believed that these white Trump voters opposed inclusion and tolerance. His definition of whitelash connects this concept to wider perspectives around whiteness, and it leads to the question of what gives white people the right to oppose inclusion. Ahmed’s (2007) interpretation of whiteness argues that it is not merely a rhetorical construction but an orientation that shapes subsequent rhetorical constructions, desires, and possibilities. Ahmed and many other “nonwhite” bodies’ experiences in a “white world” find that racialized structures lead non-reflexive white people to treat others as guests whom they grant privileges as they deem fit (150). Thus, white orientations could explain whitelash.

However, such orientations do not necessarily come from facts. Indeed, the existence of racial divisions has been questioned entirely. Specifically, Trump’s supporters were made to believe that the government’s actions and people’s support for inclusion and tolerance came at the expense of white people. The belief that whites are “losing out” because of supposed privileges that other social groups receive can be identified in Trump’s speeches and public opinion polls done by research centers and media houses (Sengupta et al. 2018). Anti-immigration was a key issue weaponized by Trump to spread that narrative (Kellner 2017; Embrick et al. 2020). Economic scapegoating was part of Trump’s electoral arsenal (Sengupta et al. 2018). Trump’s voters believed that his policies would act against immigration to protect their jobs from immigrants (Sengupta et al. 2018). For the most part, these claims are pure hoaxes often utilized by right-leaning governments to secure votes from their support base (Blake and Adolino 2011).

Blake and Adolino (2011) rightly identified that “a tougher stand on immigration has tended to pay off” at the electoral booths (156). Pew Research Center’s (2018) electorate demographics report for the 2016 elections shows that non-college graduates, regardless of their race, albeit more so if white, voted for Trump. An argument about immigrants stealing jobs sought to appeal to those people by accusing immigrants of working in low-skilled roles that the American white worker would have attained their livelihood from instead (Borjas 2016). Note that questions of feminism and masculinity are also important in assessing Trump’s electoral victory. Data shows that men tended to vote for Trump while women

were more likely to vote for Clinton (Pew Research Center 2018). The role gender played in Trump's electoral success certainly requires a separate, more in-depth study. Nevertheless, the consideration of gender further shows the inadequacy of whitelash as a concept in explaining Trump's victory. The difference in race has been more apparent, as well (Pew Research Center 2018). Apart from gender, the overall effects of the campaign and presidency were that Trump made voters despise globalization, immigrants, people of color, and other elites.

Many commentators attributed Trump's election to the (white) working class. It was believed that they won against 'The Establishment'—the dominant social and political groups that allegedly suppressed them (Kellner 2017). However, Bhambra (2017) denounces that explanation. Bhambra posits that empirical analyses and proper class definitions categorize Trump's voters as middle-class. Overall, Bhambra extended two key conclusions. Firstly, Trump voters were generally richer than other Americans. Empirical data supports this claim. From 1967 to 2014, white households consistently maintained a near double per capita household income, compared to Hispanics and blacks (Pew Research Center 2016). Data from the Board of Governors of the US Federal Reserve System in 2022 shows that over 80% of national assets were held by white households, not radically different from previous years (USAFacts 2023). The second claim was that only one-third of Trump's voters came from lower economic classes (Bhambra 2017). However, mainstream discourse often attributes his victory to the working class (Bhambra 2017). A closer look at the data reveals mishandled statistics. While pro-Republican areas averaged low-income levels, the average Trump voter was richer than the average Clinton voter (Bump 2017). Ultimately, Bhambra (2017) posited that class analyses failed to acknowledge the interplay of race in modern politics, and, with Kellner (2017), rejected a significant working-class involvement in Trump's victory.

Populism

A deeper examination of the philosophical foundations of Kellner (2017) and Bhambra's (2017) discussions regarding whitelash provides the groundwork for understanding right-wing populism. In this context, right-wing populism is understood as an "ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups...and which argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people" (Mudde 2004, as cited in Urbinati 2019, 116). While Kellner introduces Nietzsche to his framework, Bhambra builds her philosophical foundation on the concept

of class. Moreso, it is important to note that she defines class rigidly. She also ignores Marxism.

I argue that Kellner's equation of Trump's followers to Nietzsche misunderstands Nietzsche's philosophy. It is not uncommon for Nietzsche's philosophy to be associated with fascism, Nazism, Zionism, and other supremacists. For example, most popularly, Nietzschean philosophy's anti-God beginnings and calls for an *Übermensch* are associated with "heroic realism"—Nazi-versions of Nietzschean philosophy that endorse a law-less, genocidal, and supremacist theory (The Wilson Quarterly 2008). However, such supremacist interpretations of Nietzsche constitute philosophical misappropriations (Golomb and Wistrich 2002). Kellner ascribes Christian religious awakening to Nietzsche. However, Nietzsche vehemently opposed religions such as Christianity and preferred the centrality of free will in discerning one's morality, while opposing racial supremacy (The Wilson Quarterly 2008). Ultimately, there is a different angle through which such philosophical discussions can be viewed in the context of Trump.

The facets of Trump's ascendancy do not parallel the Nietzschean philosophy of becoming an *Übermensch*. Rather, they parallel misappropriations of data, information, and narratives to fool a following for votes, principally as Nazis misappropriated Nietzschean philosophy to justify their supremacy (The Wilson Quarterly 2008). Trump's scapegoating of immigrants and opposition to Mexicans, Muslims, and generalizations of the blacks are well known. Many studies investigating practices among Trump supporters find racial impacts of Trump's politics on them. Schrock et al. (2021) found that Trump's voters actively used racial and emotional communication during the 2016 elections. The US FactCheck.org (2015) declared that no other entity matched the number of falsehoods and denials to admit errors as Trump in 12 years of their work. Such fabrications of data and narratives were a core part of Trump's electoral strategy. Such strategies are common among populists (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012). Interpreting Trump's electoral victory as whitelash takes away from these broader conceptualizations and understandings of political phenomena.

The second philosophical consideration connects with how Bhambra (2017) conducts a class analysis. Bhambra (2017) has engaged deeply with claims that the working class elected Trump. While the findings that differentiate the role of different classes in electing Trump are empirically sound, the overall conclusion omits points more relevant to class analyses. There are little meaningful implications to draw from concluding that the middle class, instead of the working class, primarily elected Trump. Class analyses should pose specific and change-oriented inferences. In this context, class analyses of Trump's voter

base should include the feelings voters had against the Establishment, globalization, and the economic order at the time. Claiming that it was the middle class, not the working class, that elected Trump extends the implication that his voters should not have felt economically disadvantaged. This facet needs greater attention as scapegoating and misrepresenting information played a larger role than technical quirks about which class Trump's voters fall under.

It is also important to include a Marxist interpretation in class analysis. Marx's conceptualization of class consciousness expounds that people develop awareness against dominant ideologies in the context of their socioeconomic placement within the economic structure. In today's world, clear distinctions between middle class, working class, and bourgeois are difficult because of the increasing complexity of the economic and political system (McCreery 1964). These complexities make categorizing people by class brackets difficult under Marx's philosophy. Moreover, the philosophical implications of class consciousness are that if one believes they were economically marginalized, they act accordingly (Sengupta et al. 2018). Hence, paying too much attention to categorizing Trump's voters by income brackets is less helpful than investigating how these well-off voters were made to feel marginalized. This suggests that a more qualitative understanding of how perceptions of whiteness, wellbeing, privilege, and economic status affected voters is needed. Such an approach would extend our understanding of populism's functioning in the American context around class analyses better.

Theoretically, the ability of a politician to make themselves appear as a messiah to their voters who, despite not being marginalized, are made to feel that way, is a core tenet of populism (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012). Populist leaders present themselves as true representatives of the common public against establishments and create an othering (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012). By this definition, Trump is often classified as a populist (Zembylas 2019; Masaru 2021). If enough considerations have not already been viewed to support a populist understanding of Trump, other patterns can be identified, too. Mudde and Kaltwasser note that populists usually win two terms. When they fail, they deny election results and disrupt public order¹. The January 6 Capitol Attack matches that argument. Many of Trump's other actions during his presidency are also populist tenets, such as hostility towards intelligence, ethics agencies, judiciary, law enforcement, and other institutional

¹ I have retained the definitions of "populism" that characterize its right-wing anti-democratic and often capitalist tendencies. The discussion around 'corrective' populism that is good for democracies is too nuanced and irrelevant to include in this paper. See Stavrakakis (2018) and Mansbridge and Macedo (2019) for more on corrective and left-wing populism.

players (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Despite these considerations and Kellner's labelling of Trump's movement as "populist," he did not place populism's explanatory power over whitelash (Kellner 2017, 143).

Reviewing other theories can provide more nuance toward understanding whitelash in the context of populism. Moreover, doing so ultimately highlights why populism is the better framework. Empirical studies extending these theories and works conducted in other regions would further expand our understanding of whitelash, whiteness, and populism in both Trump's electoral victory and the broader American context.

For example, Sengupta et al. (2018) explore the role of perceptions of deprivation through the Relative Deprivation Theory. They note that groups compare themselves with other groups and draw conclusions that enhance their wellbeing, regardless of the accuracy of these beliefs. To test this claim, they study whiteness in Australia and obtain affirmative results. In essence, the discussion around perceptions, inter-group comparisons, and wellbeing connect with the design of right-wing populism's success. The feeling of relative deprivation also explains the formerly discussed connection between whitelash and whiteness that whiteness can explain Trump supporters' so-called whitelash. However, given the lack of such research in the American context, an advancement on that front is needed for empirical confidence. This would provide data to test the strength of the underlying social theory connections with Trump's victory or discover if it was an exceptional event or one that was influenced by whiteness.

This discussion also reinforces the claim that populism is a better explanatory concept than whitelash. Whitelash can be understood as a phenomenon incited by appealing to voters' whiteness through populist rhetoric. McDermott and Ferguson (2022) outline how questions about the impact of "racialized rhetoric" on "the visibility of whiteness" are emerging across countries where anti-immigration and racist politics are taking hold (261). At the same time, the increasing visibility of whiteness does not instantly translate into whitelash. The aftermath of events like the January 2021 US Capitol attack and George Floyd's murder also create opportunities for more reflection and critical discussions. Further theoretically guided qualitative research should investigate what directions such discussions take. Specifically, McDermott and Ferguson ask whether awareness during such moments "translates to action that dismantles the power of whiteness" (268).

Populists also primarily weaponize social-group-based nationalism to win elections (Geary et al. 2020). Populist politics inherently divides society. A broader reason for placing populism in higher regard compared to whitelash is its broader applicability in understanding

similar domestic political climates across countries. Notable examples of right-wing populism polarizing society include Italy, Brazil, and France, among others (Russo 2021). The Indian Hindutva nationalist government rose to power similarly by weaponizing the Hindu religion against the corrupt establishment and non-Hindus (Plagemann and Destradi 2019). Populist tendencies globally share nationalism, homogeneity, othering, and impatience with deliberation, often championed by a single leader as common features that hurt democracies (Mansbdrige and Macedo 2019). Thus, the populist framework provides a strong understanding of Trump's strategy, supplanting a sole whitelash perspective.

Additionally, populism's manifestations during a presidency and not just in campaigning also need to be understood. Although nationalist fervor elects populists, populists' actions rather serve personal or niche interests than nationally beneficial ones. Indeed, in Trump's context, pursuits of self-interest can be identified instead of a mission that truly represented and prioritized whiteness. Howell and Moe (2020) describe Trump's management of political affairs at the White House as "the same way he ran his personal business" (87). Such actions are less democratic as Trump considered himself a boss, easily evicting individuals who disagreed with him. Running a government as a personal business also results in excessive focus on financial indicators, unprofessional communication, and personality-driven policy-ignorant leadership, all visible tenets in Trump's presidency. Even Thatcher's legacy was considered populist and nationalist, although her actions harmed the average person and aided capitalists by widening income inequalities (Fry 2008; Stepney 2014).

Blake and Adolino (2011) show that while the use of anti-immigrant rhetoric wins elections, it often does not reduce immigration, as voters do not and cannot track changes (since immigrants do not pose the threat they are accused of posing). Essentially, populist promises constitute marketing gimmicks rather than actual problem-solving—Trump's white nationalist appeal does not translate to the purported gains (Gruszczynski and Lawrence 2019; Kølvråa 2022). In research assessing Trump's actions during his presidency, his impact on socioeconomic indicators could also be studied as it was in Thatcher's case. Finally, there are predisposed factors that allow populism to succeed and other factors that contribute to electoral victories that must also be considered.

Other Factors Conducive to Trump's Electoral Victory

Populism tends to surface under certain conditions that make it easy for politicians to unite a group based on identity (Varshney 2021). Socioeconomic problems in America

since 2008 catalyzed Trump's ascendancy (Sandel 2018). In addition to economic scapegoating, Trump reached out effectively to whites who felt disempowered (Sandel 2018). Contemporary findings also suggest that Trump's rhetoric highlights increasing white racial anxieties about a "nonwhite majority" dominating the demographic (Kelly 2020, 195). Essentially, Trump leveraged social conditions to make populism successful; it would be incorrect to claim that American democracy and society were perfect, and Trump single-handedly ruined it with his persuasive, entertaining, and racist politics (Hall et al. 2016). White anxieties persisting from colonial-era mindsets activated and cultivated those people's whiteness who were or grew skeptical of Obama (Patel 2017). Such skepticism and the conditions it created that led people to vote for someone who represented whiteness grew to the extent that Patel (2017) characterizes Obama's election as "the political rise of Donald Trump."

Such white anxieties have been understood in connection with settler colonialism, where settler colonialism is understood as a structure instead of a historic moment (Patel 2017). This view posits that occupation never finishes, and occupants continually suppress the non-dominant groups and structures. However, this view contradicts the definition of whiteness that claims it originates from those who were alienated from the system. How can a white settler colonial structure be in place simultaneous to white people being alienated? This view is not an either/or, as there has been progress in acknowledging race and working towards inclusivity, and whiteness has grown more complex than dichotomous understandings of colonizers versus the colonized (Ahmed 2007; McDermott and Ferguson 2022).

Election strategies also matter. While Trump's electoral strategy indeed leveraged whiteness to catalyze whiteness, part of his success is also because of the Democrats' failures where race is less directly relevant. Trump's campaign was objectively more nuanced, updated, and effective (Singh 2019). Compared to Clinton, Trump effectively united voters with emotional appeals, such as "Make America Great Again." Trump's campaigning also leveraged more personal and informal forms of communication, like rallies that developed better connections with him and potential voters than Clinton could (Feinberg et al. 2022). Clinton's campaigning strategy also fell short in strategically picking the right states and protecting herself from the barrage of accusations raised by the opposition (Kellner 2017). In essence, "democrats were out of touch with the major forms of communication and the electorate" (Kellner 2017, 139). Kellner also highlights other issues that damaged the credibility of the Democrats and Clinton as their leader. The critique against the Clintons has

been common since the 1990s following several controversies, hurting their credibility substantially (Patterson 2016). Even if the allegations were untrue, their existence discomforted voters. Moreover, Democrats' performance in previous years was poor. Sandel (2018) criticizes their technocratic liberalism. Akin (2018) finds that social media's aggression against right-wing users polarized society. Overall, the Democrats' relevance was declining just as their success in solving national issues (Bogaards 2017). This renders effective campaigning even more important.

The campaigning advantages have been the determining factor for the success of other populist governments worldwide where race was not a significant factor, as observed in India. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) politicians in India that formed the central government in 2014 and 2019 utilized channels of demographically sorted WhatsApp groups where BJP IT Cell campaigners maintained close relationships with group members (Nizaruddin 2021). These relationships enhanced trust and made it easy for campaigners to disseminate any kind of information, including lies, to prospective voters (Banaji 2018; Nizaruddin 2021). BJP's election campaign was also more technologically adept, utilizing social data on Facebook more efficiently than opposing parties (Singh 2019). The populist rhetoric of unity also allowed them to win an election by the technicality of having a greater vote share, while a larger proportion of the country's votes were scattered across other parties (Singh 2019). The observation of such patterns across different social contexts but similar dynamics in other states' domestic political climates reinforce the usefulness of the concept of populism or broader explanatory frameworks than whitelash.

Voter turnout also influenced the 2016 election. The 18 to 29 age group had the lowest voter turnout at 43.4%, with ages 30 to 44 at 56.9%, 45 to 59 at 66.2%, and 60+ at 71.4% (Macdonald 2020). People of color have an overall turnout of only 54%. Given that the youth and people of color overwhelmingly vote Democrat, this is an issue (Pew Research Center 2018). Finally, comparing the voter turnout between the 2012 and 2016 elections suggests that the working class played a greater role in Trump's election than Bhambra (2017) argues. Between 2012 and 2016, only the working class's voter turnout increased while all other brackets decreased (Morgan and Lee 2017). It is beyond the scope of this article to explore why different groups had different turnouts and what factors explain changes in the working class's voter turnout beyond Trump's calling. However, these are important questions relevant for further research investigating public political participation. Understanding such differences can also help campaigners strategize better.

Education and Issues Intrinsic to Liberal Democracies

What is next? Apart from the identified avenues for academic research, this topic has direct, important, and time-sensitive implications for politics and people. Research must not aim to reverse Trump's damages by retracing steps or idealizing a past image of American democracy but move in a different direction, such as questioning education as a solution and rethinking neoliberal democracy itself.

Educate the Masses?

Considering America's history and this resurgence of white nationalism, Kellner (2017) suggests education as a solution to curb the rise of what is essentially right-wing populism and white exclusionary nationalism. Interpretations of historic and national events also shape citizens' nationalisms differently. However, the aspect of knowledge of history is not applicable in Trump's context, i.e., the voters are not seeking a revival of decades-old, heightened levels of white supremacy, for two main reasons.

Firstly, a significant portion of Americans lack a solid grasp of their history. This undermines the feasibility of seeking to reinstate any perceived dominance when such aspirations are built upon a weak historical knowledge foundation. A YouGov survey investigating Americans' historical knowledge shows that most Americans have little to no knowledge about non-salient and older events (Sanders 2021). A survey of 41,000 Americans in all states by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation concludes that Americans' knowledge of national history was "abysmal" as only 27% of Americans aged below 45 had a "basic knowledge of American history" (Woods 2019).

Secondly, the weaponization of whitelash was not based on empirical evidence or history, rather, it was Trump's effective campaigning style that distorted facts and created false narratives, such as scapegoating immigrants and opposing political correctness (Sengupta et al. 2018). Overemphasizing whitelash as an explanatory concept has led to proposing unhelpful solutions. Discussing whitelash may prove helpful in understanding actions that altered institutions and led to 'nice racism' and 'color blindness' rhetoric during Trump's presidency (Lippard et al. 2020). Subsequently, understanding Trump's election from a critical perspective of political structures will provide better explanations and solutions.

Striving for More Systemic Changes

Bonilla-Silva (2018) rightly identifies that returning to "politics as usual" may be counterproductive as those systems had inherent features susceptible to fallouts and conducive to imbalanced power dynamics. Global right-wing populist trends, sparing not

even developed nations, raise important questions about why they came to be and what impact they will leave on the country's institutions, questions which the whitelash perspective significantly falls short of addressing (Scanni 2021). Thus, future trajectories must also account for such issues with democratic systems.

Liberal democracies are inherently imperfect for many reasons. The common public is not rational. Representative democracies work on the assumption that they are. However, the non-rationality of the common public makes democracies susceptible to populism (Finchelstein and Urbinati 2018). How can a country conventionally known for espousing liberal and democratic values defend itself against the fallouts seemingly created by the very systems it is often celebrated for? While some researchers find certain contexts that make states susceptible to these pitfalls, others consider the neoliberal structure entirely to be susceptible to the rise of anti-democratic politics (Ramos 2022). More radical perspectives find that liberal democracies and ethnic representation pave the way for identity politics, which takes away from anti-bourgeois politics and radical policy changes (Alcoff and Mohanty 2006).

Liberal democratic functioning also turns elections and the presidency into a vote-seeking competition where funds are wasted on what is essentially marketing. Such structures encourage vote-seeking behavior that compromises reason and problem-solving (Zohlnhofer 2009). In the American context, studies show more confident alarming results. Gilens and Page's (2014) study of factors influencing 1779 policy decisions in America found that economic elites and business-oriented interest groups significantly influence government policy decisions while average citizens and people-centric interest groups have negligible influence.

Finally, an increasing scholarly trend is emerging where liberal democracies often depict intrinsic contradictions within their values, produce income inequalities, and create civil discord (Wedekind 2020). These tenets propose that not only is it inadequate to attribute Trump's electoral victory to whitelash, but that a discussion of populism that does not probe its links to features of liberal democracy itself may be less helpful for academic and change-making pursuits. Further discussion is encouraged to investigate links between electoral rules, country-specific constitutional rules, and populist actions to better understand the connections between susceptibility to right-wing populism and democracy's intrinsic flaws. This will prove helpful in the context of America and beyond for political theorists and institutional design in strengthening democracy more meaningfully and sustainably.

Conclusion

Whitelash is only one strategy in Trump's toolkit. While it is valid, it lacks explanatory power in explaining Trump's ascendance and presidency, compared to other factors like voter turnout, election campaigning (marketing), failures of the opposition candidate, and issues intrinsic to liberal democracies. Overall, right-wing populist theory better explains Trump's electoral victory than whitelash does. However, deeper investigations of whiteness may be more relevant to understanding Trump's presidency. Additionally, some other factors also prove important in understanding electoral feats. In Trump's case, voter turnout, failures of the Democrat's campaigning and successes, and wider critiques of democratic institutions and campaigning objectives are also important. Whitelash loses even more power as it fails to provide meaningful solutions, compared to populism and the non-Trump factors.

Education was proposed as the response to whitelash to change Trump's voters' beliefs about white glories, superiority, and nationalism. However, that solution is unhelpful, given the irrelevance of knowledge of past glories, if any. In terms of class analysis, studies from Marxist and political psychological perspectives are warranted as the current literature against white privilege misses a lot of important insights. Overall, the paper concludes that whitelash was a part of Trump's presidency but does not work as an explanatory or evaluative framework, lacking external and construct validity, which are essential tenets of political science theories and methods. Nonetheless, whiteness and whitelash can be studied more empirically in the American context for an understanding better than currently extended.

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