Title:

Is it time to use the F word about Trump: Populism, fascism and the rebirth of history

Submitted by:

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In 2022, President Joe Biden suggested that supporters of Donald Trump were engaging in what he termed 'semi-fascism.' His voice added to ongoing debates inside and outside academia about the extent to which Trump was a 'populist' or a 'fascist.' This discussion of terminology is not trivial. In order to counteract Trumpism, the nature of the threat that it represents must be understood. Accordingly, I will discuss the nature of populism and of fascism. Resisting the urge to propose an 'essentialist' definition, in which some static characteristics are held to be vital for the full phenomenon to be present, I argue that populism and fascism are intertwined. There is always the potential for populism to become fully fledged fascism, and fascist forces have consistently played a significant role in populist movements, including Trumpism. Both populism and fascism rest on narratives which depict the world as being in a state of almost terminal crisis. It is argued that this crisis is caused by various outgroups – e.g. Jews, people of colour, immigrants. A crusade is proposed to limit their influence or eliminate them altogether. Ingroups, on the other hand, are depicted in a superior light. But it is argued that their power is being unfairly constrained by the underhand actions of the designated outgroup. A nostalgic focus on a mythical past proposes that the power of the ingroup can be re-established – e.g. Make America Great Again (MAGA).

Insofar as it has traits that distinguish it from right wing populism, fascism is associated with overt and brutal force, the banning of opposition, and the establishment of a one-party state. Populism exploits people's fears at what are often genuine concerns. Fascism takes this further, to become a violent form of *organised despair.* I argue that a transition from populism towards fascism within the Republican Party is now underway in the United States. In particular, the January 6th 2001 attempted insurrection is viewed as a defining movement, when Trumpism stepped over the line and into an overt fascist position. As historian Peter Turchin has argued, the Republican Party is being transformed into a 'revolutionary party.' It no longer supports democracy, and is only willing to endorse elections that it wins. Meanwhile, many MAGA supporters are openly advocating civil war, including Trump's former key aide, Steve Bannon.

In addition, Trump and his aides are carefully planning an agenda for a second term which involves the further gerrymandering of electoral boundaries, a purging of the American civil service to sack anyone who isn't completely loyal to Trump's agenda, and the removal of those viewed as unsuitable from electoral rolls. The judiciary would be a key target. Should they succeed, the potential exists for a permanent Republican presidency dominated by increasingly right-wing extremists. If Trump falls by the wayside, other mini-Trumps would be found to advance his agenda. Instead of what Fukuyama called 'the end of history', in which the norms of liberal democracy had become an uncontested good throughout the globe, history has been reborn with a vengeance.

I also argue that fascism must be viewed as process rather than a static phenomenon or a one-off event. A new Trump administration would not begin as a fully-fledged fascist regime.

Elements of opposition would remain. But a fascist direction of travel would become increasingly evident. Even if opposition parties are not formally banned, restrictions would be imposed to ensure that they are ineffective. Should they continue to resist, an open civil war (of a protracted, episodic and intermittently violent nature) is entirely possible. Democratic norms would wither and only be able to re-establish themselves after a protracted and tenacious struggle.

This paper also discusses what can be done to avoid these outcomes. This involves recognising that the vengeful, racist and hate filled narratives of Trumpism can only be defeated by narratives that offer better ideas. While some, including a small number of organizational scholars (e.g. Paul Adler), have argued in favour of a revived form of socialist democracy, I instead propose what Geoffrey Hodgson has described as a reinvigoration of 'liberal solidarity.' This involves recognising the harm inflicted on society by neoliberalism, and proposes a comprehensive reimagining of our economy and politics to promote overall wellbeing.

Society has faced huge crises before, most noticeably in the 1930s and 1940s. Our problems today can be overcome. But this requires that we have no illusions in what is at stake, that we resist the populist/ fascist dynamics that are now evident, and engage in a concerted effort to articulate better and more inspiring alternatives.

American Caesarism? Authoritarian leadership and Trumpism

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Abstract
The end of Donald Trump's presidency of the United States was inaugurated by the largest voter turnout in American history (Seipel 2016). Trump himself was to garner more votes than any other previous presidential candidate, except for his opponent, Joe Biden (Montanaro 2020). And yet, for all that, the end was ignominious. Trump refused to accept the result. He made outlandish and demonstrably false claims of a conspiracy to rig the election through implausibly widespread electoral fraud, and unsubstantiated corruption by electoral officials in multiple states (Jaimungal 2020). Critics reasonably worried that this was a serious attempt at reversing the election result and undermining the institutions of the Republic, ironically framed and justified by false claims that the election itself had been stolen (Gearan and Dawsey 2021). Five days after the election, on 7 November 2020, as the majority of media outlets and TV networks finally called the result, the Trump campaign attempted to organize a press conference at the Four Seasons Hotel in Philadelphia, only to quickly correct that it actually was to be held at "Four Seasons Total Landscaping", a small garden centre on a strip mall in Holmesburg Philadelphia that was located between a crematorium and an erotic bookstore (Hanson 2020). Despite the bungling that seemed emblematic of a failing grasp on power, Trump refused to concede or to acknowledge the reality of his election defeat. What had been a kind of denialism moved into a concerted effort to de-legitimate the electoral process, and to put pressure on the House and the Senate not to ratify the votes of the Electoral College (Stevens et al. 2021). What then occurred in January 2021 has become one of the most infamous events in recent American history. Following a series of speeches encouraging various levels of dissent and violence, a rally by Trump supporters on 6 January 2021–they day of the ratification of the Electoral College votes–rapidly descended into mob violence as the Capitol was stormed in what appeared to be an attempted coup (Fuchs 2021). The rioting in the Capitol lead to the deaths of five people, including one police officer–Brian Sicknick–who was beaten to death (Healy 2021). Though control was restored within a few hours, the images of the occupation–including the flying of the Confederate flag in the Capitol–was, and remains, a potent indictment of how close the American Republic had come being unable to ensure a peaceful and orderly transfer of power.

Despite this (or perhaps because of this) Donald Trump is currently the leading candidate to be the Republican nominee for the US Presidential election in 2024. His framing of candidacy directly relates to the narrative of a 'stolen' election in 2020 that legitimates abandoning the constitutional norms of the American state. As he recently claimed, the 2020 election was a 'massive Fraud ... [the] magnitude allows for the termination of all rules, regulations, and articles, even those found in the Constitution' (Holmes 2022). The political discourse within the Republican Party and the wider American Right continues to be defined and dominated by an approach to leadership which appears to transgress many of the democratic norms historically associated with the mainstream of American politics.

In this paper we argue that the final weeks of the Trump presidency and the on-going Trump candidacy are consistent the approach to leadership inherent in the emerging ideology of 'Trumpism' (Spector and Wilson 2018; Mollan and Geesin 2019; Wyman-McCarty 2018). We argue that 'Trumpism' is exemplary of 'Caesarism'–the idea of authoritarian kingship/dictatorship in place of democracy. Our approach is twofold. First, we discuss the various theories of Caesarian leadership drawing on Weber, Gramsci and Spengler, and relate this to the existing literature on authoritarian leadership (Tourish, 2013). Second, we explore how influential right-wing intellectuals in both the mainstream Republican movement and also in the far right draw on these very ideas about Caesarism to elaborate and justify

the ideology which has come to be known as Trumpism. Our contribution is to understand the relationship between Caesarism and Trumpism and how this explain both the popular appeal of Trump and how these intellectual advocates for Trump see him as a cipher that advances their anti-democratic ambitions. Methodologically, we undertake this by analysing right-wing publications, blogs and interviews as well as analysing public documents such as the transcripts from the January 6th hearings.

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Populist leadership in England: a system of symbolic power production

Ron Kerr

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Introduction: The purpose of the paper

In recent years, scholars of leadership have increasingly challenged the centrality of the heroic leader in understanding leadership (Cunliffe and Erikson 2011, Edwards and Bolden 2023), moving the focus away from leader-centric studies to consider different, decentred perspectives, e.g., leadership as practice, distributed leadership, etc. However, in theories of populist politics (Mouffe 2018), the leader still plays a central role, (self-) positioned as representing 'the people' against a deracinated establishment/elite (Errejón et al, 2016).

Meanwhile, recent work in OS on populism (e.g., Robinson and Bristow 2020), has identified the necessity of considering the role of organising in populist politics (Kerr et al. 2022). Therefore, critical organisation and leadership scholars are, we suggest, well-equipped to explore how *éminence grise* political strategists organize a politics of campaigning in which the persona of the nominated leader plays a symbolic (and mediatised) role.

We address this question: how can we theorise the relational dynamics of political/populist leadership as system? Drawing on accounts of populist campaigns in the UK 2016-2019, we contribute deeper understanding of the changing relationships between forms of campaigning, forms of expertise, and political leadership.

The study

We focus on the Brexit campaign by Vote Leave (2015-16), which we understand from a leadership and organisations perspective as an ensemble of experts in campaigning strategy (with the *éminence grise* figure of Dominic Cummings), strategic communications, polling, focus groups, and micro-targeting - a rationalised, technicised process - aimed at affect, emotion. For example, 'Take back control' (2016) was a simple, brutal messages tested via polling and focus groups and intended to 'cut through' in the media, including targeted social media.

Theoretically, we take a Bourdieusian/relational approach to populist leadership. Populist politics in its contemporary national manifestations can be considered a series of political campaigns (Bourdieu 1989/2022: 105). Consequently, there is an increased reliance on new forms of expertise, and/or new applications of existing expertise in the organisation of politics. This involves the recruitment of specialised agents from interconnected fields: field of ideological production, strategists, media communications specialists, polling experts who are often *passeurs* circulating between the fields: from 'political correspondent' to media advisor

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to politician (Champagne 2005). The power of the leader is therefore relational in terms of the *éminence grise*/strategist and the other key organisational players.

In this context, 'leadership' is, we suggest, a specific, relational, form of expertise, based on the mediatisation of a persona: e.g., the constructed 'Boris' persona (from 'Al' to 'Boris'), circulating between the fields of journalism, TV, politics.

Discussion and conclusions

In Bourdieusian terms, the leader plays a symbolic role based on two forms of political capital: (1) acquired via the party, investiture, delegation/consecration (Darras 2005). And (2) by 'being known and recognised in person', either professional, through 'a specialised knowledge or experience accumulated through public service', or 'heroic or prophetic' (Swartz 2013: 65-66).

But in contemporary populist politics personal forms of capital are embodied and *mediatised* in the person and image of the leader (Campus 2010, 2013). That is, popular mass media and social media play a central role in the struggle for 'symbolic domination' across wider society. This process necessities the production of a figure who is consecrated and given symbolic weight by the media (Campus 2010), a *mediatised persona*, who follows instructions designed by the strategic director (the *éminence grise* figure): i.e., told where to go, when, and what to say, required to stay 'on message'.

So, in terms of political leadership and organising, we argue that populist campaigns bring together an ensemble of organisations and individuals, with the persona of the leader incorporated into a system of symbolic power production.

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From Zero Sum to Three Strands: Diplomatic Leadership and the Northern Ireland Peace Process

Leadership is often conceptualised as a public endeavour, with dimensions that are both personal and collective. However, in some contexts, purposeful leadership can be both publicly impactful and obscured from the general gaze. This paper sets out to do three things. Firstly, will explore leadership and leadership behaviours of a small organisational unit (the Anglo-Irish Division of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs) in the context of the resolution of an intractable and multi-dimensional problem – the Northern Ireland conflict. Secondly, it will look at the development of organisational purpose over an extended timeframe - in this case thirty years, and how it connects to action; and thirdly it will explore what we can learn about how to better engage with seemingly unresolvable problems from the conflict transformation experience of Northern Ireland.

This paper is one outcome of a wider project which looks in detail at the role of the Anglo-Irish Division of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs. This Division was formally tasked with managing relationships with political and community actors in Northern Ireland throughout the conflict and as the primary liaison with both London and Washington(Doyle 2004, Wolff and Dursun-Özkanca 2012, McLoughlin and Meagher 2019). It draws on a range of data, which includes two sets of semi structured interviews (71 in total) with high-ranking diplomats who served within the Division as well as some political and other governmental actors who worked with them. In addition, it draws on personal documentation gathered from interviewees and extensive British and Irish archival sources. The study design was guided by a concern for developing a processual and temporal understanding of how an unfolding process of engagement and activity yielded particular outcomes, overtime and in a volatile and dangerous context (Walsh and Bartunek 2011).

In doing this, the paper looks at the underlying and generally obscured leadership practices of Irish diplomats in their engagement with the Northern Ireland peace process over a period of thirty years. Those interviewed defined their purpose almost universally as *"Peace"*. It explores this purposeful leadership as a collective endeavour, exercised over time and indeed generations, with the aim of creating lasting change. Actions over this time focused on the long and painstaking process of building a critical mass of support for a fundamental reframing of the conflict around three sets of relationships (Murphy, Denyer et al. 2020) and

away from its former zero sum conceptualisation. The paper will explore how this process was enacted organisationally, including how culture was managed at periods of high tension and extreme violence, how networks of trust were built internally and externally, how morale was managed in the worst of days(Grey, 2012), the norms and strategies adopted, the impact of secrecy and knowledge, the relative nature of autonomy and of the institutional entrepreneurship that lay behind key periods of action. This paper contends that violence and the transition from it are organisational challenges, as well as a political and community challenges (Murphy 2020) and that this aspect of organisational life is under researched.

The experience of the Northern Ireland peace process is a rare example of successful system wide change which has been maintained despite repeated system shocks. Recent scholarship has underlined the need for theorists to move beyond intra organisational perspectives and to look more critically at how individuals and organizations can and do contribute to collective action and system wide change (Grint 2010, Ferraro, Etzion et al. 2015). This study of the Anglo-Irish Division is an opportunity to understand better how persistent organisational action and individual and collective agency can contribute to the resolution of intractable social problems, such as ethno-political conflict processes.

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