

UNCERTAINTY / INSECURITY

The Underlying Source for Trumpism and All Forms of Populism
2018

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Many variables potentially promote uncertainty/insecurity in individual humans and in their social groups at all levels. Any one of these or combination of them when of sufficient strength can have the effect of engendering anger/outrage at the personal level and populous movements at the societal level. Below are some of the major influential variables active in generating uncertainty in modern American society, and western society in general:

1) Economic. Stagnant standards of living in the context of expectations for constant escalation of this standard – however unwarranted – create frustration in the populous. When combined with increasing economic inequality among the citizenry, envy and anger result in the “lesser,” but much greater, public. This is particularly true when existing job/profession uncertainty arises due to outsourcing, globalization, and technological innovation – especially computerization [high capacity, sophisticated software], robotics, and artificial intelligence. In this area, uncertainty has crept up the scale of occupational levels and now encompasses what are regarded as the lower level professional occupations – legal, medical, accounting, engineering, etc. So, white collar [upper middle class] job uncertainty is becoming pervasive, not just blue collar [lower and middle class] job uncertainty. There are fewer and fewer stable, long term professional and working class jobs making it necessary for the employed at all levels to expect through their careers to have to look for new jobs out of necessity, not just for advancement. As the society ages and work is expected to persist into more advanced years, the need to be constantly facing a change in jobs, and possibly the need to move to a different location, becomes more and more threatening. Economic uncertainty and insecurity are very important elements in the current populist environment in America and western countries.

Socio-Economic. If individuals or groups perceive their own good/self interest to be the result of competition coming from other racial, ethnic, religious, class, etc. groups – whether real or just conveniently attributed, then these “others” can easily become the targets of anger and aggressive behavior. Immigrants, migrants, and “different” others are often such targets in the effort by one group to address the underlying uncertainty/insecurity over their welfare that this group is experiencing. Identifying and pointing to these targets is a common ploy of populists, whatever their political persuasion. Susceptibility by groups to such populist appeals rests ultimately in the degree of the uncertainty that the group is experiencing due to the influence of other variables.

2) Media. With the advent first of print, then broadcast and then internet based media, information of all kinds has become ubiquitous. The field of print and broadcast journalism, where there once existed commitment to the facts and truth of reports/assertions, has been significantly undermined by the input of the uncontrolled domain of talk shows, blogs and social media platforms. In this context, opinion rules, and facts are selected and often fabricated in part or wholesale to support a predetermined opinion/position. The news has always been attracted to the sensational, and negative/bad news is always more sensational than positive/good news. And in the modern situation of infinite information available to the media, there is always negative news somewhere with the potential for highly charged verbiage and visual imagery to accompany its reports. The result is that the public is overwhelmed by negative real news, disinformation, and often fake news. The combined effect of our modern information news sources is to flood the public with a consuming and depressive cloud of negativity and uncertainty about the present and the future.

3) Social: Family and Community. The prevalence of mobility and divorce in modern life have decimated the stability that the nuclear family, the extended family, and the stable community once provided. A sense of being grounded in a stable geographical place, and even in a stable physical home, has been undermined by pursuit of the freedom made available by mobility. As a result, from childhood, uncertainty in place, family and community is a constant source of insecurity in modern social life for a majority of citizens.

4) Political. Social and economic extreme divisions in society are reflected in political parties that tend toward the extremes. When one party represents the perspective of the competitive, hierarchical economy [capitalism], and the other represents the perspective of the cooperative, egalitarian polity [representative democracy], a battle is assured. And when the balance between these two forces is threatened by the competitive money side seeking to buy undue influence in the political and judicial domains, severe contests are bound to ensue. Imbalance and lack of cooperation in the political realm can easily lead to a lack of efficiency in government which can result in a substantial element of the public losing faith in government itself to address the interests of its citizens. This stalemate and lack of faith creates uncertainty about the reliability of government and its judiciary. This avenue to uncertainty/insecurity has been prominent in recent years in America.

5) Religious, Spiritual and Material. The focus of modern life on secular materialism promotes the public's confusion of pleasure/reward with contentment/happiness. Constantly seeking immediate pleasure in things to be

owned and displayed or to be consumed [food and drugs] only provides short term satisfaction. So, taking this consumer path in the effort to achieve a state of happiness only results in individuals and groups placing themselves on a perpetual reward seeking treadmill in a process that is futile and that can easily lead to addiction. Once basic human biological and material needs are met, very little additional input from these sources contributes to real happiness. Happiness derives mainly from two additional sources: stable and high quality social relations and a spiritual understanding of self. As family and community diminish in their input to yield quality and lasting social relations and as modern individuals and groups become more isolated, the social basis for individual and collective happiness recedes creating a social environment of generalized uncertainty. And in modern life, as religion is rejected and spirituality, which lies at the core of all religions, is discarded in the process, modern individuals and groups no longer have access to a subjective source for a confirmation of their self worth. This is another significant, modern source of uncertainty/insecurity.

Conclusion. Populism, of which Trumpism is one expression, feeds on uncertainty, and uncertainty/insecurity in modern life is promoted by all of the above major variables. Most successful populist movements are based on multiple sources of significant uncertainty in comparatively large groups within society. Typically populists offer simple solutions to complex challenges to a public that is vulnerable because of exposure to some combination of the above sources of uncertainty. A public that is aware of how populism gains traction can rise above such simple minded appeals and demand real solutions to real challenges based on real facts. And as a result, that public can see changes implemented that actually reduce the underlying uncertainty that fosters populism to begin with.