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DOES THE FUTURE BELONG TO POPULISM OR THE ESTABLISHMENT



For decades people have sided with dichotomies such as left vs. right or Democrat vs. Republican.

What if we reach a fork in the ideological road where both options look less desirable? What if instead of looking either left or right, voters begin to look up or down and ask where should change directly come from? From the establishment or the grassroots?

Consider this historical fact: America has never witnessed two simultaneous large-scale populist revolts within the same decade.

Around 2010/2011, many began to wonder whether there was any real difference between president's 43 and 44. Hence, Occupy Wall St. and the Tea Party's coinciding movements culminated in the inevitable rise of Sanders and Trump.

Despite Bernie's back-to-back defeats (though many of his followers have cried foul play) and Trump's 2020 loss (many of his followers cry foul play) – is populism dead or is it just beginning? That could be a rhetorical question.

Then consider, the populist trend is not just isolated to America. Week after week, tens of thousands in nations throughout the world march on their capitols in defiance of lockdowns. Recall, before COVID-19, protests around the globe were going viral. The common theme was dissatisfaction with corruption and the growing gap between the wealthy and poor. Perhaps we have yet to see the real boiling point.

The following analysis comes from a nationwide online poll of 821 likely US voters, conducted on January 29th. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.5 percentage points.

Does the future belong to populism or the establishment?

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By Jeremy Zogby

We begin with a baseline question:

Do your political values align more with the establishment or populist wing of your party/ideology?

	Overall	Very Lib.	Liberal	Moderate	Conserv.	Very Cons.
Establishment	32%	43%	39%	30%	37%	27%
Populist	19%	26%	17%	14%	21%	29%
Not sure	49%	31%	44%	56%	42%	44%

The symmetry is fascinating. Self-identified populists are found across the board. Though more intense the further left and right you go, but still significant near and around the center.

However, the most important highlight is the large levels of those not sure in each camp.

As we reveal the various issues and messages tested in this poll, will voters sway one way or another? Or will they still display large percentages reporting unsure?

On foreign policy, do you believe it is better for the US government to invest more heavily in the military to enhance strategic positions around the globe OR take a leading role in peace by ending US wars

	Overall	Very Lib.	Liberal	Moderate	Conserv.	Very Cons.
Invest Heavily...	30%	37%	15%	23%	40%	57%
End US Wars	53%	57%	70%	60%	47%	31%
Not sure	17%	6%	15%	18%	13%	13%

On foreign policy, large swathes of the public and across the political spectrum prefer ending US wars over investing more in the military to advance strategic positions.

Notice the drastic reduction in those who were previously not sure when asked if they identified with populism or the establishment.

We continue with an issue usually associated with those on the left.

On the environment, if you had to choose one over the other, do you believe the US government should place more emphasis on economic development or preserving nature?

	Overall	Very Lib.	Liberal	Moderate	Conserv.	Very Cons.
Development	43%	41%	28%	36%	60%	63%
Preservation	42%	51%	70%	46%	30%	26%
Not sure	15%	8%	15%	18%	11%	12%

Looking at overall, it's almost dead split. Looking at ideology, greater support for preservation comes from the center and left, though once again, significant minorities are grounded in both camps on the right.

Not as broad or profound in terms of a coalition transcending left and right, but still intriguing.

What about the next issue tested?

On personal data stored by corporations and government agencies, do you believe they do more good or more harm with this information?

	Overall	Very Lib.	Liberal	Moderate	Conserv.	Very Cons.
More Good	24%	46%	27%	20%	24%	23%
More Harm	51%	41%	48%	52%	61%	55%
Not sure	25%	13%	26%	28%	15%	22%

A clear majority have real concern over their personal data being stored (and consequently harvested) by powerful institutions.

One should begin to ask, while we know what the left and right differ over, *why is so little attention given to what they agree on?*

The picture is starting to become clear that perhaps the real divide in this country is more about those who align with the establishment based on their trust of the experts to shape society vs. those who are increasingly distrustful of the establishment and want to take control back over their lives.

Regarding the economy, do you believe Wall St. generally creates stability for the economy or creates instability in the economy?

	Overall	Very Lib.	Liberal	Moderate	Conserv.	Very Cons.
Stability	38%	41%	28%	36%	60%	63%
Instability	37%	51%	70%	46%	30%	26%
Not sure	25%	8%	15%	18%	11%	12%

Moderates and those on the left have more distrust for Wall St. On the right, there is greater trust. However, over one-quarter in both camps on the right believe the economic engine of the U.S. creates instability in the economy.

The question over Wall St. is key, but there is a much larger question regarding the economy in general.

On steering the economy, do you believe the Federal government should assume greater powers or grant more powers to the community level?

	Overall	Very Lib.	Liberal	Moderate	Conserv.	Very Cons.
Centralize	22%	51%	36%	17%	12%	22%
Decentralize	58%	37%	48%	60%	70%	64%
Not sure	20%	12%	16%	23%	18%	14%

Overall, decentralization is by far preferred to centralizing power to steer the economy. At the same time, we don't know whether those who prefer to decentralize would rally behind F.A. Hayek or Agorism. It is likely, however, that a multitude of approaches at the local level would be favored. Call it the laboratory of democracy, or experimenting with what is effective and ineffective, ultimately to be discovered via a loop of positive and negative feedback. In the end, a one size fits all approach is becoming less desirable.

The Implications

Today's top story will not be found on tomorrow's evening news. Instead, you will mostly see and hear deep-seated division and dangerous tribalism that borders on the worship of partisan iconography and personalities.

A political realignment may be long overdue. One that transcends the two-dimensional nature of left vs. right and instead focuses on philosophical debates of centralization vs. decentralization, as evidenced in the data above.

Is it in the nation's best interest to tune out politics and rediscover civics? Questions over human rights vs. natural rights are **far more likely to lead individuals towards enlightening discussions rather than incessant debates over red vs. blue.**

On a final note, it is crucial to highlight that the purpose of exploring populism vs. the establishment was to identify common ground between the left, center, and right, as well as identify potential new debates moving forward.