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POLITICAL CULTURE AND THE DOMESTIC ASPECTS OF AMERICAN LEADERSHIP

TOWARDS A NEW VERSION OF THE CLASH
OF CIVILIZATIONS



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SUMMARY

Donald Trump assumed the American presidency in the aftermath of a bitterly fought presidential campaign. Instead of healing the political wounds of the nation in the time-honoured American tradition of pragmatic arbitration, the Trump administration has drawn upon polarizing politico-cultural trends to frame the tenets of its America First policy agenda both domestically and globally. Two such developments in American domestic political culture, the narratives of decline and the revival of religiosity, are particularly relevant when assessing the Trump administration's leadership mode and its emphasis on securing Western civilization against its enemies.

Tapping into these underlying politico-cultural trends allowed Trump to win an election in an era when the structural demographic trends in America should have favoured the democratic candidate. However, by utilizing them as a mode of legitimation for its rule, the administration risks further confrontation and polarization of the American body politic. Internationally, the result has been a Manichean message of a civilizational battle between good and evil, suspicion of globalist influences and alliances, along with the drive to erect stronger borders. When assessing the Trump phenomenon and its implications for America's global role, it is therefore essential to acknowledge that the sense of American decline, the revival of nativism and religion in US politics, and the country's changing demographics are intimately intertwined with broader debates over America's national and, by implication, foreign policy identity.

INTRODUCTION

Often, the task of an American political leader is to turn morally and culturally polarizing problems into resolvable and manageable ones. A president is expected to work for the common good, starting from the assumption that problems can be solved through careful and committed management.¹ The American political landscape has long stressed the importance of good faith, which opens up the possibility of disagreeing in a reasoned and constructive manner and of convincing others through dialogue.² In this manner, “[a] reasonable disagreement is not just any disagreement: it is among people who argue in good faith”.³ This search for commonsensical solutions has been central to the American tradition of pragmatic pluralism. However, in the present climate of political polarization, such pragmatic arbitration through an issue-focused good faith dialogue is becoming increasingly difficult. People with diverse backgrounds and ideologies are finding it harder to make decisions, act together in an orderly fashion and find common ground. This has implications for domestic and global leadership due to heightened disagreements, fluctuations, and stagnation.

The presidency of Donald Trump was preceded by an extraordinarily polarized campaign. Rather than trying to turn moral problems into manageable practical ones through goodwill and redefining the commonsensical, Trump turned practical issues into signs of moral difference. He often used Manichean and demonizing language and certainly did not treat political opponents with kid gloves.⁴ Instead of intellectually convincing people through professorial speeches in the vein of his predecessor Barack Obama, Trump often utilized different devices – tweets, media interviews, and speeches – to persuade people of the presumed existence of a shared but now lost communal and moral element in America. This underlying ingredient is framed in conservative, populist, and even reactionary terms. Trump’s use of such politico-cultural resources is at times incoherent and even self-contradictory. However, it is also dynamic and can trigger elements in “a set of largely unconscious and unexamined convictions by which a community understands its own meaning and finds guidance for its most fundamental decisions in history”.⁵ This set of convictions has been termed civil religion, “the collection of beliefs, symbols, and sentiments that connect the nation to some type of transcendent reality”.⁶ It encompasses the foundational myths by which a political community remembers and reproduces itself, as well as the rites and devotions of this grounding process. This “American creed” is not based on a globalist understanding of

1 R. H. Williams & N. J. Demerath, ‘Religion and Political Process in an American City’, *American Sociological Review*, vol. 56, 1991, p. 419.

2 C. Larmore, *The Morals of Modernity*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 162.

3 M. C. Nussbaum, ‘Political Objectivity’, *New Literary History*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2002, p. 890.

4 See Politico Staff, ‘Full Transcript: Second 2016 Presidential Debate’, Politico, 2016, <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/10/2016-presidential-debate-transcript-229519>, accessed 19 April 2017.

5 J. F. Maclear, ‘Isaac Watts and the Idea of Public Religion’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 53, No. 1, 1992, p. 25 fn. 1.

6 Williams & Demerath, op. cit., p. 417.

the US as a multicultural community, but rather on identifying the US as a community whose practices draw on Christian values, a European heritage, and the idea of the West as a Christian and capitalist civilization.⁷

The starting point for our exposition is the premise that “[e]very foreign policy maker is as much a member of the social cognitive structure that characterizes her society as any average citizen”.⁸ American Presidents can thus be viewed as actors embedded in dense structures of social interaction and contestation in both the domestic and international arenas.⁹ They draw upon, arbitrate between and justify their policies based on the different ideological and identity-based narratives in the domestic arena. Drawing on these factors, state policy is then enacted in actual instances of foreign policy decision-making on the global stage.¹⁰ In this vein, the dynamics that take place at the level of domestic ideational and ideological contestation become an essential factor when considering developments in the global role of the United States and its evolving relationship with allies and foes alike. They influence the central tenets of the American foreign policy consensus: the US should have a global leadership role, it should remain globally engaged, and should maintain its responsibilities and commitments.

In particular, this paper approaches two such trends in American domestic political culture, the *narratives of decline* and the *revival of religiosity*, to uncover clues about the Trump administration’s leadership mode, especially as it is related to foreign policy and America’s evolving global role. What are the politico-cultural resources available if presidential leadership no longer draws on the time-honoured mode of pragmatic arbitration? What domestic politico-cultural modes of leadership can be accessed by the Trump administration as it tries to navigate the increasingly fractious political landscape, and how do these reflect upon America’s global engagements? To what extent is it likely that the Trump administration will return to the pragmatic spirit in its leadership?

7 The American creed is a term originally coined by Swedish economist/sociologist Gunnar Myrdal to describe the foundational values of the republic, such as the “dignity of the individual”, “equality of all men” and “rights to freedom, justice and fair opportunity”. These constitutive values of America are enshrined in America’s foundational documents, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution in particular. G. Myrdal, *An American Dilemma, Volume 1: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, New York: Transaction Publishers, 1944, p. 4.

8 T. Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics*, London, Cornell University Press, 2002, p. 37.

9 This approximates to the logic of two-level games made famous by Robert Putnam. See R. Putnam, ‘Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games’, in *International Organization*, vol. 42, no. 8, 1988, pp. 427–460.

10 See e.g. H. W. Maull, ‘US Hegemony Reconstructed: America’s Role Conception and Its “Leadership” within Its Core Alliances’, in S. Harnisch, C. Frank, H. W. Maull, *Role Theory in International Relations*, Abingdon, Routledge 2011, p. 170; T. Tiilikainen, ‘The Making of Middle East Policies: The Conceptual Framework of Foreign Policy-Making’, in T. Behr & T. Tiilikainen, *Northern Europe and the making of the EU’s Mediterranean and Middle East Policies*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2015, pp. 14–17; L. Aggestam, ‘Role Identity and the Europeanisation of Foreign Policy: A Political-Cultural Approach’, in B. Tonra & T. Christiansen, *Rethinking European Union Foreign Policy*, Manchester, Manchester University Press 2004, p. 86.

AMERICAN NARRATIVES OF DOOM AND GLOOM

According to opinion polls, an increasing number of Americans believe that the US is on the wrong track, or a declining path.¹¹ However, there are two prevalent and competing formulations of American decline: liberal and conservative.

The liberal narrative of decline concentrates on the status of America as a lawfully and justly regulated realm with minorities able to voice their opinions. Both at home and abroad, the US should strive to be a nation of rules and laws. Liberals see the US as a self-perfecting and self-governing community, where the struggle for expanding justice should be the key rationale. The liberal vision also calls for normative consistency in US foreign policy – do unto others what you want done unto you.¹² President Barack Obama’s often repeated phrase “the arc of history bends towards justice” is a good illustration of how just rules should be seen as a starting point for domestic government and global engagement.¹³ The conservative version of declinism, in contrast, is sensitive towards signs of decay in the national character, patriotic zeal, freedom, civilization, and the American civil religion or creed. In the sphere of foreign engagement, the conservative vision sees dangers in the lack of dynamic and direct action, even if this comes at the expense of policy consistency. These two views are competing, contradictory, and increasingly mutually exclusive. Within both formulations, any deviations from their respective ideals and norms are regarded as signs of dangerous decay and political regression.

Donald Trump, by and large, subscribes to the conservative declinist narrative and it constitutes a key building block of his threat perceptions. He has highlighted the need to put America first in its dealings with the rest of the world,¹⁴ and drawn parallels between excessive liberal/globalist ambitions and the US being on the wrong track domestically

11 According to a *Wall Street Journal* and NBC News poll from 17th of July, 2016, for instance, 73 per cent “say things have gone off-course”. A. Zitner, ‘U.S. Seen on Wrong Track by Nearly Three-Quarters of Voters’, *Wall Street Journal*, 2016, https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-seen-on-wrong-track-by-nearly-three-quarters-of-voters-1468760580?mod=wsj_streaming_latest_headlines, accessed 18 April 2017.

12 For arguments reflecting the tenets of the liberal declinist view, see e.g. G. J. Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis and Transformation of the American World Order*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, pp. 326–331; C. Kupchan, *No One’s World: The West, the Rising Rest and the Coming Global Turn*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 159–166.

13 Washington Post Staff. ‘Full Transcript: President Obama’s Speech on the 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington’, in *Washington Post*, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/transcript-president-obamas-speech-on-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-march-on-washington/2013/08/28/0138e01e-0ffb-11e3-8cdd-bcdc09410972_story.html?utm_term=.e705cc67fbae, accessed 10 May 2017.

14 White House, ‘America First Foreign Policy’, in White House, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/america-first-foreign-policy>, accessed 10 May 2017.

and internationally.¹⁵ In the Trumpian trope, this theme of overextension encompasses different yet interrelated variants. Economic overstretch evokes problematic outflows of capital, a global imbalance of trade surpluses, “unfair” free trade pacts or stifling climate change regulations, all of which point towards a US disadvantage.¹⁶ There is also a sense of danger that the United States is living beyond its means by externally straining its military resources – consider, for instance, Trump’s recent comments about the need for fairer burden-sharing in NATO.¹⁷

Trump has also made strong references to a cultural/ideological form of overstretch. This view measures the degree of over-extendedness with reference to civic resources, such as decay in morality, culture, society, or work ethics. It is fairly common in the conservative narrative of American overextension to see foreign influences in a causal role in the nation’s political regression. Trump’s comments about “bad Mexicans”, the need to build a border wall, or his toying with labelling China a currency manipulator can be viewed in this light.¹⁸ These remarks and proposals chime well with recent notable conservative formulations of decline. For example, the declinist vision refers to the possibility that outsiders will culturally undermine core American values if the US tries to integrate too many people or accommodate the national interests of too many allies, partners, and adversaries.¹⁹ The danger is that core American civic beliefs will be diluted by foreign practices or elements.

15 White House, ‘The Inaugural Address’, in White House, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/inaugural-address>, accessed 18 April 2017; P. Stephens, ‘America First or America Alone’, in *Financial Times* 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/ae092214-d36f-11e6-b06b-680c49b4b4c0>, accessed 10 May 2017.

16 White House, ‘Trade Deals That Work For All Americans’, in White House, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/trade-deals-working-all-americans>, accessed 10 May 2017; White House, ‘An America First Energy Plan’, in White House, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/america-first-energy>, accessed 10 May 2017; W. Ross, ‘Donald Trump Will Make Trade Fair Again’, in *Financial Times*, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/c93e66b4-1886-11e7-9c35-0dd2cb31823a>, accessed 10 May 2017.

17 White House, ‘Joint Press Conference of President Trump and NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg’, in White House, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/04/12/joint-press-conference-president-trump-and-nato-secretary-general>, accessed 10 May 2017; White House, ‘Remarks by President Trump at NATO Unveiling of the Article 5 and Berlin Wall Memorials – Brussels, Belgium’, White House, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/05/25/remarks-president-trump-nato-unveiling-article-5-and-berlin-wall>, accessed 26 May 2015.

18 A. Tennery, ‘Trump’s “Bad Hombres” and “Nasty Woman” Remarks Stoke Online Outrage’, in Reuters, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-debate-socialmedia-idUSKCN12K0I4>, accessed 10 May 2017; White House, ‘Remarks by President Trump at the National Rifle Association Leadership Forum’, in White House, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/04/28/remarks-president-trump-national-rifle-association-leadership-forum>, accessed 28 April 2017; D. Lawder, ‘Trump Backs Away from Labeling China a Currency Manipulator’, in Reuters, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-currency-idUSKBN17E2L8>, accessed 10 May 2017.

19 See e.g. R. Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy*. *The Atlantic*, 1994, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1994/02/the-coming-anarchy/304670/>, accessed 17 April 2017; S. P. Huntington, *The Hispanic Challenge*, *Foreign Policy*, no. 141, Mar. – Apr. 2004, pp. 30–45.

In this vein, America's global role comes to be understood as a function of a "healthy" domestic civil religion. Hence, the prevalent sense of internal problems and societal ills – a vast drug problem, inner-city violence, a high violent crime rate coupled with lack of national direction and mission, and the decline of family values – employed by Trump in his rhetoric is also relevant from the perspective of US global engagement. In the language of decline and fall, these are problems stemming from perceived civil irreligiosity.²⁰ In Trump's "America First" ideology, these underlying problems can only be fixed by avoiding global overextension. International commitments are thus seen as a function of, or in the worst case detrimental to, domestic health. From this standpoint, the new president embodies a transitionary figure who will rid US foreign policy of the misinformed strategy of "deep engagement" favoured by Obama-era liberals and Bush-era neoconservatives, and place it on a footing increasingly favoured by the country's populace.²¹

20 White House, 'The Inaugural Address', op. cit.; *New York Times*, 'Trump's Speech to Congress: Video and Transcript', in *New York Times*, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/28/us/politics/trump-congress-video-transcript.html>, accessed 1 March 2017.

21 See R. L. Schweller 'A Third-Image Explanation for Why Trump Now: A Response to Robert Jervis's "President Trump and IR Theory"', ISS Forum, 2017, <http://issforum.org/roundtables/policy/1-5M-third-image>, accessed 10 May 2017.

CIVILIZATIONAL FOCUS

The narratives of American decline have international implications and tangible consequences for the preferred US global role, methods of engagement and perception of threats. Trump highlights the concept of civilization instead of the much more traditional terms of human rights, democracy and freedom, and has done so in speeches to domestic and international audiences alike.²² Trump's vision encompasses civilized regions, places of prosperity and security surrounded by enemies that seek access to American territory, culture, and prosperity. The civilized world is the last stronghold against the barbaric element of chaos, which Kaplan once termed *The Coming Anarchy*.²³ Trump often uses language that suggests signs of contagious processes and elements – decay, corruption, mismanagement, political violence, drugs, and so on – that threaten to spread to the US from the outside.²⁴ The *modus operandi* of the Trumpian world map thus represents a *cordon sanitaire* type of thinking, where international borders and lines of communication from air and sea to cyber represent possible vectors for the spread of dangerous cultural contagions. For Trump, liberal ideas and institutions represent the wrong types of “cures” for America's present ills. Primarily, America's resources need to be used for the defence of the homeland and the “civilized world”.²⁵

Trump's vision for America's global engagement and domestic regeneration bears similarities with Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* framework.²⁶ In Huntington's view, the international politics of the post-Cold War world is dominated by neither economic conflict between the privileged and the dispossessed nor a battle between competing ideologies. Instead, in this novel age, “cultural identity is what is most meaningful to people”.²⁷ The essence of the argument is that future conflicts in international politics will take place between “cultural entities”, which he terms

22 See e.g. E. M. Ashford, 'Trump's Team Should Ditch the "Clash of Civilizations"', *The National Interest*, 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/trumps-team-should-ditch-the-clash-civilizations-18654>; G. Rachman 'Trump, Islam and the Clash of Civilisations', *Financial Times*, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/18eb6c9e-eee2-11e6-930f-061b01e23655>, accessed 10 May 2017; White House, 'Remarks by President Trump at NATO', op. cit.

23 Kaplan, op. cit.

24 White House, 'The Inaugural Address', op. cit.; *New York Times*, 'Trump's Speech to Congress', op. cit.

25 White House, 'The Inaugural Address', op. cit.; White House, 'America First Foreign Policy', op. cit.

26 G. Rachman, op. cit.; S. M. Walt, 'Five Ways Donald Trump Is Wrong About Islam', in *Foreign Policy*, 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/02/17/five-ways-donald-trump-is-wrong-about-islam/>, accessed 19 February 2017.

27 S. P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, London, Simon and Schuster, 2002 [1998], p. 20.

civilizations.²⁸ Invariably, these clashes occur along civilizational “fault lines”, and although at the “macro or global level the primary clash [...] is between the west and the rest”, for Huntington the most precarious of civilizational divides exists between the non-Muslim and Muslim worlds.²⁹

Some of President Trump’s advisors, including former Breitbart executive Stephen Bannon and conservative commentator Michael Anton, subscribe to this civilizational worldview and frame “radical Islamic terrorism” as an existential threat to the United States.³⁰ Trump’s inauguration speech, reportedly written in part by Bannon, evoked the notion of the civilized world locked in conflict with “radical Islamic terrorism, which we [America with Trump at the helm] will eradicate completely from the face of the earth”.³¹ In this vein, the task of the new administration is to act as a vanguard in the inter-civilizational battle between the Judeo-Christian West and the “others”, whom Trump in a recent speech in Saudi Arabia framed as “Islamist extremists” and Iran.³²

The Trump administration began putting these civilizational sentiments into practice in the form of an executive order issued on 27 January, banning travel from seven Muslim-majority countries.³³ The implementation of most provisions in the ban was frozen by a US district judge in the state of Washington, however, in a verdict which was upheld by the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.³⁴ A revised order in March sought to rectify some of the most troubling aspects of the original one, exempting permanent US residents and visa-holders and dropping the reference to the preferential treatment

28 S. P. Huntington, ‘The Clash of Civilizations?’, in *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 3, 1993, pp. 22–23. In his 1996 book, Huntington distinguished between eight such civilizations: Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Orthodox, Western, Latin American and, with a caveat, African. Huntington, ‘*The Clash of Civilizations*’, op. cit., pp. 45–47.

29 Huntington, ‘*The Clash of Civilizations*’, op. cit., p. 255.

30 J. Schulberg, ‘Trump Aide Derided Islam, Immigration and Diversity, Embraced an Anti-Semitic Past’, in *Huffington Post*, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/michael-anton-trump-essay-publius-decius-mus_us_589ba947e4b09bd304bff3c8, accessed 13 March 2017; M. Anton, ‘America and the Liberal International Order’, in *American Affairs*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2017, pp. 113–125; R. Teague Beckwith, ‘Read Steve Bannon and Reince Priebus’, Joint Interview at CPAC’, in *TIME*, <http://time.com/4681094/reince-priebus-steve-bannon-cpac-interview-transcript/>, accessed 26 May 2017.

31 White House, ‘The Inaugural Address’, op. cit.

32 White House, ‘President Trump’s Speech to the Arab Islamic American Summit’, White House, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/05/21/president-trumps-speech-arab-islamic-american-summit>, accessed 26 May 2017.

33 White House, ‘Executive Order: Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States’, in White House, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/27/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states>, accessed 10 April 2017.

34 M. Ford, ‘Federal Judges Refuse to Reinstate Trump’s Immigration Ban’, *The Atlantic*, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/02/ninth-circuit-trump-ruling/516228/>, accessed 10 May 2017.

of religious minorities.³⁵ Nevertheless, based on remarks made by Trump during his campaign and by his administration after the issuance of the original order, opponents – and more importantly the courts – have continued to advance the argument that the restrictions imposed actually amount to an attack on Islam as a religion.³⁶

The Clash of Civilizations worldview of the Trump administration is not limited to the battle against terrorism, however. In fact, there is a strong domestic politics aspect to Huntington's thesis, which reflected his fear for the future of the United States as an imagined community.³⁷ Huntington notably identified immigration as a source of potential decay in the political community. Of particular concern were those immigrants "from other civilizations who reject assimilation and continue to adhere to and propagate the values, customs, and cultures of their home societies".³⁸ For Huntington, the perceived danger was intensified by modern forms of communication. Previously, once immigrants crossed regional and continental divides, they largely lost contact with their native landscape. However, according to Huntington, contemporary forms of contact mean that immigrants' umbilical cords are not cut in the same way, and links remain, turning people from different civilizations into a potential source of decay and erosion.³⁹ Huntington evoked a psychiatric metaphor by equating decaying societies with schizophrenia.⁴⁰ The disease results from allowing incompatible foreign elements into domestic environments, thereby creating dangerously hybrid mixtures of different civilizational groups. This erosion of America's homogenizing identity and the American creed that underpins it could, in the end, lead the US to rescind its leadership role as the vanguard of Western civilization. In the inter-civilizational battle, this scenario would precipitate an inevitable decline of not only the United States, but the West at large.⁴¹

The Trump campaign approximated these Huntingtonian views, especially in its inflammatory immigration rhetoric. The president's tone has admittedly softened

35 G. Thrush, 'Trump's New Travel Ban Blocks Migrants from Six Nations, Sparing Iraq', in *New York Times*, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/06/us/politics/travel-ban-muslim-trump.html>, accessed 10 April 2017.

36 J. Gerstein, 'Hawaii Judge Halts Trump's Second Attempt at Travel Ban', in Politico, 2017, <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/03/trump-revised-travel-ban-judge-hearing-236086>, accessed 16 March 2017. M. Ford, 'A Make-or-Break Moment for Trump's Travel Ban?', in *The Atlantic*, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/05/fourth-circuit-travel-ban-oral-arguments/525900/>, accessed 9 May 2017.

37 See the discussion by E. el-Din Aysha, 'Samuel Huntington and the Geopolitics of American Identity : The Function of Foreign Policy in America's Domestic Clash of Civilizations', in *International Studies Perspectives*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2003, pp. 113–132. On imagined communities, see B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1991, pp. 5–7.

38 Huntington, *The Hispanic Challenge*, op. cit., p. 141.

39 S. P. Huntington, 'The Erosion of American National Interests', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 76, no. 5, 1997, pp. 28–49.

40 Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, op. cit., p. 306.

41 Aysha, op. cit.

since his infamous comments describing Mexican immigrants as criminals and drug traffickers.⁴² Nevertheless, he has retained the substantive edge of his attack on immigration by securitizing it as an internal security threat in key speeches,⁴³ issuing two executive orders calling for an increase of 5,000 Border Patrol agents and 10,000 immigration officers, along with penalties for so-called sanctuary cities unwilling to aid the federal government in the deportation of illegal aliens.⁴⁴ Most notably, candidate Trump pledged to erect a wall on the Mexican border, a promise that he still insists on honouring as president, although he has been forced to put his plans on hold in the face of congressional unwillingness to fund the project.⁴⁵ However, as part of the budget deal to avoid a government shutdown, Congress did agree to allocate \$1.5 billion in funding to strengthen border and aviation security.⁴⁶ The Trump offensive on immigration is taking place amidst estimates that show illegal immigration to the United States, especially via the Southern border, is slowing down. In fact, according to Pew Research Center, since 2009 the number of Mexican immigrants leaving the US has exceeded the number of new entrants.⁴⁷

Overall, the civilizational compass that guides the Trump administration plays into the conservative version of declinism by proposing to redefine America's global role and modes of engagement. Keeping one's distance and acting from a distance are preferred over direct contact.

42 *TIME*, 'Donald Trump's Presidential Announcement Speech', in *TIME*, 2015, <http://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/>, accessed 14 March 2017.

43 White House, 'The Inaugural Address', op. cit.; *New York Times*, 'Trump's Speech to Congress', op. cit. On securitization, see B. Buzan, O. Wæver & J. de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, London: Lynne Rienner, 1999.

44 White House, 'Executive Order: Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States', in White House, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/25/presidential-executive-order-enhancing-public-safety-interior-united>, accessed 10 April 2017; White House, 'Executive Order: Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements', in White House, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/25/executive-order-border-security-and-immigration-enforcement-improvements>, accessed 10 April 2017.

45 *TIME*, 'Donald Trump's Presidential Announcement Speech', op. cit.; *New York Times*, 'Trump's Speech to Congress', op. cit.; C. Hulse, 'Why Congress's Bipartisan Budget Deal Should Make Trump Worried', in *New York Times*, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/01/us/politics/congress-budget-deal-democrats-republicans.html>, accessed 9 May 2017.

46 R. Nixon, 'Trump's Immigration Proposals "Conspicuously Absent" from Spending Bill', in *New York Times*, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/03/us/politics/trump-immigration-spending-bill.html>, accessed 9 May 2017.

47 J. S. Passel & D. Cohn, 'Overall Number of U.S. Unauthorized Immigrants Holds Steady Since 2009', in Pew Research Center, 2016, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2016/09/20/overall-number-of-u-s-unauthorized-immigrants-holds-steady-since-2009/>, accessed 10 April 2017; A. Gonzalez-Barbera & J. M. Krogstad, 'What We Know About Illegal Immigration from Mexico', in Pew Research Center, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/02/what-we-know-about-illegal-immigration-from-mexico/>, accessed 10 April 2017.

THE AMERICAN CREED AND MODES OF RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

The secularist spirit has been under challenge in American political life in recent decades. The roots of these recent developments can be traced to changes that have taken place in American Christianity, especially to the rise of charismatic evangelicalism in mainstream American society. For the re-emergence of the Christian right, the late 1970s was an important turning point. Another major background condition for the Christian revival was the civil rights movement of the 1960s, which left a lasting impact on American progressivism. Two strong but competing versions of Christian revivalism thus developed as backlashes against political disorder and the appearance that Washington was in disarray. The commonplaces of the decline/revival dialectic ranged from such things as legalized abortion and the perceived decline of family values, to the weakening of America's global position. The liberal version highlighted the need for a progressive interpretation of freedoms and rights. The conservative version saw these progressive themes as antagonistic developments to be resisted as weakening the American Judeo-Christian creed.

Conservative Christian narratives often claim that something went wrong in the otherwise pure and righteous US with the spread of liberal, cosmopolitan and globalist values.⁴⁸ The controversies over segregation, Vietnam, and abortion together with the emergence of AIDS contributed further to a perception that the American Christian way of life was under attack. Christian revivalism was meant to counteract the centrifugal forces caused by liberal value pluralism, socialism, mass immigration from non-Christian regions, and globalization. For the Christian right, the perceived dangers legitimized the return of openly Christian themes to public life. In the conservative narrative, liberal values thus came to be regarded as a regressive development in Western civilization and the liberal definition of America was resisted both at home and abroad – for example by sending missionaries to different regions that preached against the decadence of Western liberalism.

During the 1980s, mainstream politicians increasingly started to use religious language to express themselves. Casanova points out that the religious movement in America used terms such as “restore” and “re-establish” with reference to the Christian values and practices in public life, and started to demand that politicians be openly Christian.⁴⁹ In politics, this type of religious rhetoric supported nostalgia for a supposed American golden age that had been lost because of the liberal expansion of rights. This nostalgic yearning for a real but lost America effectively became a sounding board for political populism.

48 D. Dochuk, T. Kidd & K. Peterson, 'Introduction', in D. Dochuk, T. Kidd & K. Peterson (eds.), *American Evangelicalism: George Marsden and the State of American Religious History*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 2014, pp. 3–8.

49 J. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 158.

Traditionally, an important part of the liberal secularization hypothesis has been the desire to turn religion into a private matter.⁵⁰ Secularity of the state has been a very forceful principle in the US, whereby the multicultural nature of the nation has relied on the separation between state and church. It has been argued that “religion becomes a personal matter in the modern world, anchored in individual consciousness, rather than a cosmic force”.⁵¹

The ideological and civil religious characteristics of the Trump administration are fed by fundamental changes in the general composition of American political life. Trump’s election victory and his winning coalition can be seen as a reaction against the underlying and, according to some observers, unsurpassable demographic trends, which favour a more secularist and multiculturalist interpretation of America. In this sense, Trump’s triumph represents the victory of identity politics (and policy ideas) over structural trends.

At the aggregate level, statistics point towards a general decline in religiosity – the proportion of agnostics and those unwilling to identify their faith stood at 22.8 per cent in 2014, an increase of 6.7 per cent since 2007.⁵² However, the share of white born-again/evangelical Christians in the electorate has hovered around 20 per cent for the last two decades.⁵³ They also have increasing political salience, especially when the Republican Party is in power. Namely, it has been estimated that white born-again/evangelical Christians make up 35 per cent of Republican Party supporters.⁵⁴ When other groups with broadly similar views – namely Catholics and Mormons – are factored in, approximately 57 per cent of the Republican support base is made up of what is often termed the “Christian Right”, constituting a formidable coalition of veritably reliable voters.⁵⁵

50 Lenski summarizes the sociological secularization hypothesis as referring to the coming of scientific enlightenment: “[...] from its inception [sociology] was committed to the positivist view that religion in the modern world is merely a survival from man’s primitive past, and doomed to disappear [...]. From the positivist standpoint, religion is, basically, institutionalized ignorance and superstition”. G. Lenski, *The Religious Factor*, New York: Anchor 1961, p. 3. In a more general vein, Habermas detects a trend in the West away “from the sacred foundations of legitimacy to foundation on a common will [...] communicatively shaped and discursively clarified [...] public sphere”. J. Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, Boston: Beacon Press 1979, p. 113.

51 J. K. Hadden, ‘Towards Desacralizing Secularization Theory’, *Social Forces*, vol. 43, no. 1, 1987, pp. 153–179.

52 Pew Research Center, ‘America’s Changing Religious Landscape’, in Pew Research Center, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>, accessed 17 April 2017.

53 Pew Research Center, ‘The Changing Composition of the U.S. Political Parties’, in Pew Research Center, 2016, <http://www.people-press.org/2016/09/13/1-the-changing-composition-of-the-political-parties/>, accessed 10 April 2017.

54 *ibid.*

55 L. Marsden, ‘Conservative Evangelicals, the Tea Party and US Foreign Policy’ in *Obama and the World: New Directions in US Foreign Policy*, I. Parmar, L. B. Miller & M. Ledwidge (eds), Abingdon, Routledge, 2014, p. 121.

The apparent revival of religious themes in politics seems to point to a tendency whereby Christianity is breaking away from the private realm and returning to play an important role in the politics of the day. Although secularization is still a trend, it is counteracted by the increasing political influence of some of the Christian right's themes. This countervailing trend would also strengthen the Christian elements in American civil religion. The content of contemporary civil religion is increasingly Christian and less dependent on the values and myths of modern secularity. For example, it has become customary to include the act of prayer, which until only recently was considered a private matter, in the public speeches of the American presidents. This has served to lend a sense of introspection and mystical experience associated with prayer to public speeches.⁵⁶

According to Hunter, there are two important groups making claims for moral legitimacy in contemporary America. The first comprises the orthodox, who are united in their "commitment [...] to an external, definable, and transcendent authority". The second group can be characterized as the progressives, referring to those with more secular and pluralist civil religious ideals.⁵⁷ It can be argued that these two groups provide the stock figures of the contemporary American politico-religious scene.

The orthodox custodians of the American creed, who are priming themselves to lead their people through dramatic times, are competing with the more pragmatic figures, namely political leaders as pragmatic arbiters. Related to this dichotomy between the orthodox and progressive forms of American civil religions, it may be suggested that the two major roles accorded to modern politicians are prone to these cultural resources for a political leader. On the one hand, the legitimacy of pragmatic arbiters derives from pluralist and secularist ideas of modernity. On the other hand, the custodians of principle draw their rhetoric from the perceived moral fundamentals and authorities. Trump's custodian-of-principle type of rhetoric tends to frame Western civilization and its power in terms of religious values. From this perspective, "America first" conveys a nationalistic message of the US as God's chosen people. For instance, in announcing the April 2017 cruise missile strike against Bashar al-Assad's forces in Syria, Trump appealed to the civilized world and, in a profound break from established tradition, not only blessed America but "the entire world".⁵⁸

The conservative, custodian-of-principle type of stock figure is characterized by his or her reliance on Judeo-Christian themes – for example, on the Bible, the Holy Land, a divine mission, prayer, and God. These leaders promote an anti-declivist programme that resists liberal secularism and multiculturalism. It has also highlighted certain American experiences, such as its way of life, providence, mission, and the Founding Fathers. The current strand of conservative civil religion is also influenced by the Evangelical movement and the emergence of the religious right in America. In this sense, custodians of principle often refer to the programmatic notion that Christian ideals should guide, to a greater extent, the public life of the nation. In this context,

56 L. Schmidt, 'Religion in the Making', *Reviews in American History*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2002, p. 602.

57 J. D. Hunter, *Culture Wars*, New York, Basic Books, 1991, p. 44.

58 *TIME*, 'Trump's Remarks on the Syrian Missile Attack', *TIME*, 2017, <http://time.com/4730215/syria-missile-strike-chemical-attack-trump-transcript/>, accessed 10 May 2017.

themes such as pro-life and the freedom to carry guns have functioned as rallying calls, and these civil religiously-founded political ideals have led to strong mobilization movements, as in the case of the Tea Party and most recently the Trump campaign.

The custodian-of-principle type of leadership often makes Manichean assumptions about the nature of good and evil. The relationship with the holders of liberal values is often tense. However, the relationship with people and states deemed to be outside of or – worse – antagonistic to the American civilization is openly hostile. Again, the rhetoric that Trump used to justify the missile strike on Syria reflects this cultural mode of leadership: “Tonight I call on all civilized nations to join us in seeking to end the slaughter and bloodshed in Syria and also to end terrorism of all kinds and all types. We ask for God’s wisdom as we face the challenge of our very troubled world”.⁵⁹ A similar evocation of evil can be found in Trump’s call to Arab leaders in Riyadh to step up in the battle against terrorism: “Barbarism will deliver you no glory – piety to evil will bring you no dignity. If you choose the path of terror, your life will be empty, your life will be brief, and YOUR SOUL WILL BE CONDEMNED”.⁶⁰

Whereas the liberal secular civil religion in the US has been agitating for inclusive global institutions, the conservatives highlight exclusive borders. They see advancing global democracy, empowerment, and emancipation as dangerous symptoms of American decline. The roots of liberal humanistic civil religion may be traced back to the Enlightenment period’s fascination with human goodness and friendship. The era of *fraternité* gave substance to the civil religion based on a secular conception of humanity. Universal freedom and equality defined this concept of the broadest possible polity. In part, the ideological mobilization behind humanity derived from a secular movement opposing established forms of religion. To a large degree, this movement was not against religion per se. Rather, it criticized blind faith in the authority of religious institutions and their figures. Rational members of secular humanity could hold religious beliefs if they were not irrational and in stark contradiction to the more secular types of knowledge. Thus, humanity was a polity of deliberation over human freedom from the supernatural and accidental. It was a field defined by human agency in the shape of political ideas like democracy, and scientific ideas like the systematic study of natural phenomena. Its manifestations were humanitarian sentiments of compassion for the distant others.

The Trump administration’s worldview breaks with the secularist and liberal traditions. It holds secular values to be too ineffective and idealistic, even bleary-eyed, and wants to protect the Christian, European, and capitalist creed of the American way of life. Judging by the use of underlying cultural resources by the Trump administration, its foreign policy is likely to utilize the custodian-of-principle type of approach. Yet there is also space for pragmatism when it comes to finding commonplaces among the different camps inside its own party. At times, the Trump team may even drift more towards the Republican and conservative tradition, and away from reactionary and radical stances. However, this does not mean that the president will seek bipartisan compromises and gravitate towards the political middle.

59 *ibid.*

60 White House, ‘President Trump’s Speech to the Arab Islamic American Summit’, *op. cit.*, (block capitals in the original).

THE ENTRENCHED POLARIZATION OF IDENTITY–POLITICAL CONTESTS

Whereas the role of evangelicals and the Christian Right has grown in the Republican Party, support for Democrats within these religious groups has declined steadily over the last two decades – prior to the 2016 election, 8 per cent of the Democratic support base was made up of white evangelicals, compared to 16 per cent in 1996.⁶¹ The secular component of the Democratic base has grown accordingly, from ten per cent in the mid-90s to 29 per cent in 2016.⁶² Interestingly, the secular shift at the level of the population has not been reflected in the makeup of the legislature, however. In fact, Congress remains profoundly Christian, with over 90 per cent of members identifying with the faith.⁶³

The Christian civil religious tendencies within the Republican Party can be seen as favouring the leadership of a custodian of principle. This development has the potential to feed into increased polarization, as the Democratic Party draws increasingly on America’s progressive cultural resources for leadership.

The political manifestations of these underlying changes support deepening polarization. If a considerable proportion of the Republican Party’s base is made up of the Christian Right, there is an argument, originally coined by John Judis and Ruy Teixeira, which claims that the demographic changes unfolding in the United States will – at least in the long run – lead to the advent of a “Democratic majority”.⁶⁴ In fact, after the 2012 elections, an independent review panel ordered by the Republican National Committee (RNC) to plot a way forward for the party, recommended concerted “efforts to earn new supporters and voters” from ethnic and racial minority groups and the young and female demographics in order to prevail in future elections.⁶⁵

A recent study by the United States Census Bureau estimates that the proportion of non-Hispanic whites will decline from 62.2 per cent of the population in 2014 to 43.6 per cent in 2060.⁶⁶ If the present projections for birth, mortality and immigration rates

61 Pew Research Center, ‘The Changing Composition of the U.S. Political Parties’, op. cit.

62 *ibid.*

63 55.9 per cent of representatives identify as Protestant and 31.4 as Catholic. Pew Research Center, ‘Faith on the Hill’, in Pew Research Center, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/01/03/faith-on-the-hill-115/>, accessed 18 April 2017.

64 J. B. Judis & R. A. Teixeira, *The Emerging Democratic Majority*, London: Scribner, 2004; cf. Y. Mounk, ‘The Coming Democratic Majority? Not So Fast’, Slate, 2017, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/the_good_fight/2017/03/the_coming_democratic_majority_might_be_coming_a_lot_slower_than_you_think.html, accessed 10 May 2017.

65 H. Barbour et al., Growth and Opportunity Project, in Growth and Opportunity Project, 2013, p. 12, <http://goproject.gop.com/>, accessed 28 February 2017.

66 S. L. Colby & J. M. Ortman, ‘Projections of the Size and Composition of the U.S. Population: 2014 to 2060’, in *United States Census Bureau: Population Estimates and Projections*, 2015, p. 9, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p25-1143.pdf>, accessed 10 April 2017.

underpinning such estimates prove correct, by 2044 non-Hispanic whites will no longer comprise the largest ethnic group in the United States.⁶⁷ However, demographic changes are slow and structural in nature. Short-term political factors can intervene and render contingent what once seemed inevitable.

By the time of the 2012 presidential election between Obama and Mitt Romney, over 26 per cent of those who voted were non-white, although this figure still falls considerably short of their 37 per cent share of the American population at the time.⁶⁸ As per exit polls, Obama won overwhelmingly in the black, Hispanic and Asian voter groups, with 93, 71 and 73 per cent support, respectively.⁶⁹ The Republican candidate Romney, in turn, received 59 per cent of the white vote.⁷⁰ In the over-30s demographic, Romney beat Obama by over 2 million votes,⁷¹ while Obama had the broad support of the under-30s, with 60 per cent of the vote.⁷² Romney also racked up 79 per cent of the evangelical Protestant vote, and won the white Protestant vote overwhelmingly, with 69 per cent to Obama's 30 per cent.⁷³

Judging by the 2016 election, demography was hardly destiny, and political dynamics had intervened, at least for the interim.⁷⁴ In the fallout of the 2014 Democrat defeat in the midterm elections, John Judis had already recanted on his earlier claims regarding the

67 *ibid.*

68 P. Taylor, *The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown*, New York: Public Affairs, 2016, p. 32.

69 *New York Times*, 'President Exit Polls: Election 2012', in *New York Times*, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/elections/2012/results/president/exit-polls.html>, accessed 10 April 2017.

70 *ibid.*

71 Taylor, *loc. cit.*

72 Pew Research Center, 'How the Faithful Voted: 2012 Preliminary Analysis', in *Polling and Analysis*, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/11/07/how-the-faithful-voted-2012-preliminary-exit-poll-analysis/>, accessed 10 April 2017.

73 Pew Research Center, 'Election 2012 Post Mortem: White Evangelicals and Support for Romney', in *Polling and Analysis*, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/07/election-2012-post-mortem-white-evangelicals-and-support-for-romney/>, accessed 10 April 2017.

74 Compare J. Holland, 'Can Democrats Count on Demographic Shifts to Put Them Back in Power?', in *The Nation*, 2017, <https://www.thenation.com/article/can-democrats-count-on-demographic-shifts-to-put-them-back-in-power/>, accessed 18 April 2017; S. Trende, 'The God That Failed', in *Real Clear Politics*, 2017, http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2016/11/16/the_god_that_failed_132363.html, accessed 18 April 2017; C. Foran, 'Is There a Case for Liberal Optimism in the Trump Era?', in *The Atlantic*, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/03/trump-democrats-liberals-progressives-optimism/518142/>, accessed 18 April 2017; L. Erickson Hatalsky & J. Kessler, 'Why Demography Does Not Equal Destiny', in *Third Way*, 2017, <http://www.thirdway.org/report/why-demography-does-not-equal-destiny>, accessed 18 April 2017.

“Democratic majority”, and argued that Democrat support was declining ominously, not only within the white working class but also among the white middle class.⁷⁵

To a large extent, the crux of Trump’s winning strategy was his recognition of the “missing white voter”, who could be stirred by a clear but simplified anti-globalist, anti-establishment and culturally divisive message.⁷⁶ This, of course, constitutes a far cry from the opening up of the GOP to the diverse group of minority voters suggested by the RNC report. According to exit polls, the Republican candidate attained 58 per cent of the white vote, and particularly excelled amongst white voters without a college degree, gaining 67 per cent of the vote.⁷⁷ This allowed Trump to take control of the “Rust Belt” swing states, which ensured his victory. Hillary Clinton, although beating Trump decisively in the popular vote tally,⁷⁸ failed to garner Obama-like support from the black, Hispanic and Asian voters.⁷⁹

Lost amidst the furore over Trump’s successful mobilization of the white non-college-educated vote is the role of the Republicans’ religious coalition. Despite considerable uproar over Trump’s inflammatory rhetoric and revelations of sexism, exit polls show that the evangelicals supported the new incumbent overwhelmingly – 81 per cent voted for Trump and only 16 per cent for Clinton.⁸⁰ In fact, as analyst Sean Trende points out:

75 See W. R. Mead, ‘RIP, “Emerging Democratic Majority”’, in *The American Interest*, 2015, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2015/02/02/rip-emerging-democratic-majority/>, accessed 18 April 2017; D. Frum, ‘Securing the Republican Advantage’, in *The Atlantic*, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/02/securing-a-republican-advantage/385386/>, accessed 18 April 2017; J. Judis, ‘The Emerging Republican Advantage’, in Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/01/31/emerging-republican-advantage-pub-58932>, accessed 10 April 2017.

76 P. Trubowitz, ‘Trump’s Victory Will Fuel the Growing Backlash Against Globalization in the West’, LSE Blogs, 2016, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2016/11/28/trumps-victory-will-fuel-the-growing-backlash-against-globalization-in-the-west/>, accessed 18 April 2017; see also G. Holyk, ‘This Presidential Election Was All about Identity, Not Qualities and Issues’, in The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2016, <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/blog/running-numbers/2016-trump-presidential-election-identity-not-qualities-issues>, accessed 10 April 2017.

77 This marked a 14 per cent shift in favour of the Republican Party compared to the 2012 elections, see J. Huang, S. Jacoby, M. Strickland and K. K. R. Lai, ‘Election 2016: Exit Polls’, in *New York Times*, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/11/08/us/politics/election-exit-polls.html>, accessed 10 April 2017.

78 D. Wasserman, ‘2016 Popular Vote Tracker’, in The Cook Political Report, 2017, <http://cookpolitical.com/story/10174>, accessed 10 May 2017.

79 Clinton had 88, 65 and 65 per cent of support in the black, Hispanic and Asian demographics, respectively. See R. Ehsan, ‘The Hillary Coalition That Never Was’, in LSE Blogs, 2016, pp. 1–3, blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2016/11/18/the-hillary-coalition-that-never-was/, accessed 18 April 2017; Huang et al., op. cit.

80 Huang et al., op. cit.

Trump received more votes from white evangelicals than Clinton received from African-Americans and Hispanics combined [a considerable chunk of the Obama coalition]. This single group [the white evangelicals] very nearly cancels the Democrats' advantage among non-whites completely.⁸¹

In the 2016 election, therefore, voters subscribing to the orthodox brand of American civil religion were instrumental in dismantling the demography-based Democratic advantage. The trustworthy religious coalition, buoyed by the mobilization of the white working class, ultimately spurred Trump to victory. The religious right, therefore, provides a dependable base of followers of the orthodox civil religion, upon which the alarmist strand of conservative declinism propounded by the Trump administration can anchor itself in the ongoing contestation over America's identity-political landscape.

The most visible manifestations of a fundamental rupture in America's body politic were the protests of historic proportions that took place across the United States in the aftermath of Trump's inauguration.⁸² To make matters worse, instead of opting for measures to unite the country, the administration has stoked the flames further by feeding the insecurities of its supporters. The first months of Trump's presidency have been spent in the midst of an ongoing feud with liberal-leaning media outlets, which have gone out of their way to criticize the administration's sketchy policy record.⁸³ This strategy panders to the perception of a "liberal media bias", which remains widely shared amongst Republican supporters.⁸⁴

In the meantime, the new incumbent remains anathema to Democratic supporters and minorities, and his first months in office have done little to dissipate such sentiments. This is borne out by opinion poll data collected during the first months of Trump's presidency.

A Pew survey conducted in April found that Donald Trump's approval rating was a mere seven per cent amongst interviewees who regard themselves as Democrat or Democrat-leaning. This is an unprecedented lack of support for a new president by supporters

81 Trende, op. cit.

82 M. Broomfield, 'Women's March against Donald Trump is the Largest Day of Protests in US History, Say Political Scientists', in *The Independent*, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/womens-march-anti-donald-trump-womens-rights-largest-protest-demonstration-us-history-political-a7541081.html>, accessed 14 March 2017.

83 M. Nussbaum & N. D. McCaskill, 'White House Goes to War with the Media', in *Politico*, 2017, <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/02/trump-media-makes-up-sources-235345>, accessed 14 March 2017.

84 Gallup, 'Majority of U.S. Voters Think Media Favors Clinton', in *Gallup*, 2016, http://www.gallup.com/poll/197090/majority-voters-think-media-favors-clinton.aspx?g_source=&g_medium=&g_campaign=tiles, accessed 14 March 2017; Gallup, 'Americans Split on Media Treatment of Trump Administration', in *Gallup*, 2017, http://www.gallup.com/poll/203273/americans-split-media-treatment-trump-administration.aspx?g_source=&g_medium=&g_campaign=tiles, accessed 14 March 2017.

of the opposition party.⁸⁵ Republican and Republican-leaning respondents rate Trump highly, with 82 per cent voicing their approval. Negative views of Donald Trump's incumbency also track ethnic and racial divisions in the country. 81 per cent of black and 79 per cent of Hispanic respondents disapproved of the president's job performance. In contrast, roughly half of white respondents approve of Trump's early endeavours in the White House.⁸⁶

When it comes to reactions to President Trump's policies, particularly those tracking the administration's civilizational agenda, polarization is profound. At the most general level, according to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, anti-globalist views are prominent amongst Trump supporters – only 49 per cent regard globalization as “mostly good” for the economy.⁸⁷ In addition, 80 per cent of Trump supporters view immigrants and refugees entering the country as a “critical threat to the vital interests of the United States”.⁸⁸ Amongst GOP supporters, the figure for those who harbour similar feelings regarding “Islamic fundamentalism” is 75 per cent.⁸⁹

There is, again, an ethnic and racial component to this division. Support for Trump's first-week executive order placing restrictions on entry into the United States from seven Muslim-majority countries was 49 per cent among white respondents, while corresponding figures for black and Hispanic interviewees were eleven and seventeen per cent, respectively.⁹⁰ Notably, the response was also divided along religious lines. 76 per cent of white evangelical Protestants supported the ban. The figure fell to 50 for white mainline Protestants and 24 for the religiously unaffiliated.⁹¹ The building of the wall on the Mexican border garners widespread disapproval amongst the general populace, with 62 per cent of respondents voicing their disapproval of the construction

85 The corresponding figures for President Obama amongst Republicans in February 2009 was 37 per cent and even George W. Bush – who came to power in the wake of a Supreme Court battle over the fate of the presidency – enjoyed an approval rating of 30 per cent amongst Democrat supporters.

86 Pew Research Center, ‘Public dissatisfaction with Washington weighs on the GOP’, in Pew Research Center, 2017, <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/04/17171737/04-17-17-Political-release.pdf>, accessed 10 May 2017.

87 The corresponding figures are 59 per cent for Republican supporters and 74 per cent for Democrats. See D. Smeltz et al., ‘2016 Chicago Council Survey: America in the Age of Uncertainty’, The Chicago Council on Foreign Affairs, 2016, pp. 20–21, <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/blog/running-numbers/2016-chicago-council-survey-america-age-uncertainty>, accessed 18 April 2017.

88 *ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

89 *ibid.*, p. 15.

90 Pew Research Center, ‘Early Public Attitudes about Donald Trump’, in Pew Research Center, 2017, <http://www.people-press.org/2017/02/16/1-early-public-attitudes-about-donald-trump/>, accessed 10 April 2017.

91 *ibid.*

project. However, 74 per cent of Republicans and 80 per cent of conservative GOP supporters voiced their support for the policy.⁹²

The above analysis of opinion poll data illustrates that Trump supporters – and GOP supporters in general – hold broadly supportive views on the core themes of the Trump campaign. Although such illustrations merely scratch the surface, they not only reflect the deep polarization of America’s political landscape along party, ethnic and racial lines, but also confirm Trump’s constituencies’ weddedness to the conservative strand of civil religion and to the conservative declinist thesis propounded by the new presidency.

92 R. Suls. 'Most Americans Continue to Oppose U.S. Border Wall, Doubt Mexico Would Pay for It', Pew Research Center, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/24/most-americans-continue-to-oppose-u-s-border-wall-doubt-mexico-would-pay-for-it/>, accessed 18 April 2017.

CONCLUSION: CIVILIZATIONAL AMERICA REDEFINED

To conclude, it is important to acknowledge that the sense of American decline, the revival of nativism and religion in US politics, and the country's changing demographics are intimately intertwined with broader debates over America's national and, by implication, foreign policy identity. In contrast to the *inclusive* and multicultural vision of the Obama age, the American national identity propounded by the conservative vision of declinism and the orthodox brand of American civil religion is irredeemably *exclusive* in nature. Its relationship with outside incompatible elements can be hostile. The very inclusion of the "Other", those holding beliefs and subscribing to value systems of non-Judeo Christian (and, to a lesser extent, non-Anglo Protestant) origin, would be sufficient to destroy the very foundations of Americanness that the conservative version of civil religion relies on for sustenance.

Although the electorate as a whole has become increasingly heterogeneous, many congressional districts, for instance, remain ethnically homogenous.⁹³ The electorate is still largely "white" and Christian. Trump's winning coalition could theoretically be mobilized for future elections for years to come, and the battle lines between the liberal and conservative narratives of internal and external threats – namely sources of decline – will characterize American politics for decades.

The immigration policy illustrates the potentials for the continuation of the Trump coalition. The views on immigration legislation reform tend to track the partisan divide.⁹⁴ Studies also show that anti-immigration attitudes tend to be more pronounced in areas where few immigrants reside, and legislators hailing from such districts remain "unlikely to embrace the new demographic normal until electoral incentives demand it".⁹⁵ It can be suggested that these parts of America continue to be resistant to the more secularist and liberal cultural identifiers. This resistance could feasibly be utilized in future presidential elections as well.

The domestic cultural drivers also have consequences for US global engagement and identifications. The underlying civilizational political leadership was pronounced during the George W. Bush Administration. However, there is a distinction to be made between weak and strong forms of justifying arguments for interventionist endeavours.⁹⁶ The weaker argument, which is often employed by more pragmatically inclined presidents, stems from the premise that there are clear differences between regimes when it comes to their ability to take care of their people in accordance with responsible governance.

93 T. K. Wong, *The Politics of Immigration: Partisanship, Demographic Change, and American National Identity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 28–29.

94 M. Ehrenfreund, 'What's Incredible about Republicans' Views on Immigration Is How Much They've Changed', in *Washington Post*, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/02/03/whats-incredible-about-republicans-views-on-immigration-is-how-much-theyve-changed/?utm_term=.c9ccdcbb320, accessed 10 May 2017.

95 Wong, op. cit., pp. 29–30.

96 J. Purdy, *Liberal Empire: Assessing the Arguments*, in Global Policy Forum, 2003, <https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/154/25646.html>, accessed 26 May 2017.

Furthermore, this argument holds that regimes can be held accountable for their shortcomings, and once their failure becomes flagrant, their sovereignty becomes conditional. The existence of such unfitness thus legitimizes the exercise of direct or indirect control over foreign territory to help people, or to address a non-state challenge such as terrorism.

The stronger argument, on the other hand, assumes that there are differences in peoples' cultural characteristics when it comes to the ability to maintain legitimate rule. This argument associates interventions with a civilizing mission. Because of this existential nature, harder forms of intervention can be employed by the custodian-of-principle type of leaders, and there are signs that Trump has been utilizing this more hard-line justification – for example in dealing with Daesh, Assad's alleged gassing of people, or with the North Korean arms programmes. The strong argument does not take it for granted that all people or localities have the same ability and readiness to govern themselves. Instead, there is an underlying assumption that some are weaker and more backward than others, which, in turn, evokes a more exclusionary or openly antagonistic attitude from the US.

Contrasting with these incompatible enemies, the boundaries of the Trumpian civilization can be extended. The principles of inclusion have cultural and religious signifiers. For example, Russia as a Christian nation can potentially be included if it accepts American interests and participates in civilizational battles – for example against Daesh. Although China does not share the underlying cultural signifiers, it can also be recognized as a civilizational actor if it pays heed to American economic, trade, and geopolitical interests, and plays a role in defusing more existential dangers, for instance in relation to North Korean nuclear arms. In the case of European allies and partners, shared cultural signifiers are clearly present, but there are ideological differences and divergence over easing America's burden vis-à-vis European security. However, the likely outcome is that reliable allies and partners will be approached with pragmatic policies as long as they are seen as contributing to the civilizational defence against the likes of Daesh or al-Qaeda.

The milder interventionist argument presupposes that once a repressive deviant regime is removed, people will develop legitimate forms of self-determination and self-governance relatively quickly. The stronger form, in contrast, perceives ontological differences that have to be overcome before people are ready for self-government. Following this logic, a stronger leadership requires direct, forceful, authoritative, and long-term control over faraway “rogue” places. There is no need to talk about their form of governance or highlight their human rights violations. These issues can be left alone and, in this way, the US burden and extension will be eased. However, if regimes perceived as deviant challenge US national interests when President Trump is at the helm, American reactions will be more intense and direct than during the Obama years of strategic patience.