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Nationalism and Populism

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Nationalism and Populism: Around the World

Alexander Stille, Nadia Urbinati, Mark Lilla and Jack Snyder

By Chip Brownlee

Viktor Orbán in Hungary. Jarosław Kaczyński in Poland. Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. Narendra Modi in India. Brexit in the United Kingdom. Donald Trump in the United States. Across the world, populism and nationalism appear to be on a dramatic and troubling upswing—with one of these two trends often reinforcing the other. Established political parties, institutions of constitutional government, the media, and minority groups have come under attack from these forces, leading many mainstream politicians, academics, and journalists to see the rise of populism and nationalism as an existential threat to liberal self-government. Professors Nadia Urbinati, Mark Lilla and Jack Snyder — political scientists at Columbia University in New York — sat down to try to make sense of this global trend on a panel moderated by journalist and Columbia Journalism School Professor Alexander Stille.

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of discussing populism is the question of how one is to define such a complicated term. Its wide-ranging use by those in the press, in academe and on the political stage leaves many people wondering, “What are you talking about?” But it’s precisely this ambiguity, Prof. Urbinati argued, that is one of populism’s many strengths. It allows populists to take any form they choose. Thus, populism may have a language that is religious or a language that is secular, a language that is nationalist or one that is ideological. The members of the panel first began by trying to reach a consensus definition of what populism is. **Prof. Stille** offered one such widely quoted definition by the Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde, who writes:

“I define populism as an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups. The pure people versus the corrupt elite, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people. Populism so defined has two opposites: elitism and pluralism. Elitism is populism’s mirror image; it shares its Manichean worldview that wants politics to be an expression of the views of the moral elite, instead of the immoral people. Pluralism, on the other hand, rejects the homogeneity of both populism and elitism, seeing society as a heterogeneous collection of groups and individuals with often fundamentally different views and wishes.”

While she generally agreed with Cas Mudde’s definition of populism, **Prof. Urbinati** viewed it as a minimalist conception. Prof. Urbinati agreed that one of the main characteristics of populism is the simplification of “the elite” versus “the people”—or the few and the many. However, Prof. Urbinati argued that is connected less to the fact that those who are in power are immoral and more to the fact that they are in power at all. Populism is not simply anti-elite; it is anti-establishment, at least in the sense that the establishment is composed of those who traditionally hold political power. It is those who are in power who represent, for populists, an object of distress or consternation. They may be corrupt. They may not. But they hold power, and “the people” don’t. Many populist leaders are, in fact, part of “the elite.” Trump, for example, was part of the economic elite. It’s not so much the elite that is the issue, but the elite related to the exercise of power within institutions. To the populist, these politi-



cal leaders in power produce nothing of worth. They live off taxes and the work of the people. This makes them always open to contestation, according to Prof. Urbinati.

It should also be made clear, according to Prof. Urbinati, that populism is not simply any form of popular movement. If it is equated with everything that creates a movement of contestation inside of a democratic society, then the term becomes worthless because it covers too much. Opposition and movements of contestation are part of democratic politics. Moreover, Mudde's definition resists the idea that populism is connected to a strong leader. Whereas, for Mudde, the role of the leader is not so relevant, for Prof. Urbinati, the existence of a strong leader is imperative for a movement to truly be considered populist.

The weakening of formal, organized political party organizations, for Prof. Urbinati, is another important component of populism not present in Mudde's definition. Representative, constitutional democracy, among its many apparatuses, relies on political party organizations. They form candidates and make sense of elections to the public. In a democracy based on representation and elections, if you don't have parties—that is, if you have disintermediation of political preferences—you have the distinct possibility of populism. Thus, populist movements have often arisen out of or have begun with targeted attacks against the traditional parties, because it is not organized parties but very light and fluid parties that allow populist leaders to emerge.

The weakening of mediating political institutions like party organizations also leads to another key point: direct communication with “the people.” Between the populist leader and the people, according to Prof. Urbinati, there can be no intermediation like party organizations or the media. Examples include Silvio Berlusconi, who used his television empire to speak to the people, or Donald Trump, who communicates through social media posts on Twitter. These populist leaders have to prove they can be the face of the people and one with the people. They say, “I am the people. I don't have my own identity or autonomy. I am from you. I am like you.” Populists resent representation as mediation and instead assume the role through embodiment. This is made easier when parties and the press are weak.

Populism, once it achieves power, looks like a perpetual electoral campaign because once in power, the populist has to convince the people that he will never be the establishment. The populist needs to create a permanent mobilization of his or her supporters. This requires an enemy embodied in the establishment opposition. When the populist is in power, the government is transformed into something that is both the opposition and the government—both the government and a movement. That then raises another question: what is the aim of the populist? The aim is often to retain power in the name of the “true people.” So, either the populist movement becomes another usual majority, or it is permanently

mobilized to prove it will never be so, thus attempting to cement its grip.

Prof. Urbinati said one can view constitutional liberal democracy as a kind of elastic band that, when stretched, can reach a breaking point. And certainly, the risk of populism may be that the populist movement may stretch the band beyond that breaking point, to a final point after which the state ends up in a different type regime. In countries with strong institutions, the populist may remain in perpetual campaign mode, but in countries with weaker institutions, the elastic band of constitutionalism might be broken. In these instances, like in Hungary or Poland, the constitution or the makeup of the independent judiciary can be changed by a parliamentary majority or supermajority. Such a move raises the possibility that the populist may rewrite the constitution to cement their power. Instead of representation, constitutionalism, and checks and balances, the populist's constitutionalism is simply the celebration of that populist majority and the elimination of the possibility of being challenged by the establishment opposition. It may not replace the opposition but make the opposition so dwarfed as to not be capable of challenging the populist government.

Prof. Lilla felt some important characteristics of populism were left out, particularly the psychosocial element. One of the important elements of populism is the element of “the crowd,” he said. This helps explain why populism arises when parties are weak or why populism may target party structures. That is, parties are in the business of disaggregating crowds. Crowds are often characterized by a hostility that has been stirred up against any kind of mediation, and for the populist leader, it is a tremendous skill to know how to make people feel they're part of a crowd. Examples can be seen in the Brexit Movement, which had a kind of “crowd quality” to it, according to Prof. Lilla.

However, Prof. Lilla wanted to draw a distinction between political parties with views mainstream academics might find distasteful and those movements that are truly populist. For example, he said the Law and Justice party in Poland is simply a far-right party in power, without the necessary qualifications of being crowd-like. One need not bring in the word “populist” just to use it to criticize a regime one finds distasteful. Instead, the key to understanding populism is to view the populist leader as the medium through which a crowd is embodied. He or she is just a conduit of whatever the passions of the crowd are. If things don't work, the populist avoids blame because he is simply a conduit.

Prof. Lilla aimed to add further psychosocial analysis to the discussion. That is, when discussing populism, it is mostly the case that those trying to analyze it take what people are saying at face value. But, as Prof. Lilla argued, “we are not creatures who know ourselves.” That's what psychoanalysis teaches, he said. “We go to talk about one problem. And

then, tens of thousands of dollars later, we discovered there was actually another problem that made me think something else was our problem,” Prof. Lilla said.

With that in mind, Prof. Lilla proposed that it might be useful to think about a kind of “amorphous discontent” that is present in the current body politic. That “amorphous discontent” arises out of the rapid changes in today’s society—including digitization, automation, rising inequality, and a globalizing economy. These rapid changes combine with weak institutions and changing social norms to create a sense of “liquidity” in society. The lifespans of institutions of government and society today are now shorter than the human lifespan, Prof. Lilla said. Thus, people feel they live in a time tremendous uncertainty—with no sense of whether what they believe today will be disproven tomorrow. This leaves people feeling they are living in a world they cannot comprehend or control, giving rise to a desire for explanation and control. If no one else does, populists may manufacture a narrative and political explanation for this liquidity and amorphous discontent.

Prof. Lilla also sought to put nationalism into a larger context. Nationalism, he said, is part of a class of national feeling. National feeling—or a common sense of “we” among the people of a nation—is important for a functioning polity. The population needs a way to somehow articulate what it is that makes us a “we.” “If we think we’re on the same team that increases my sense of obligation to you,” Prof. Lilla said. But if the world is now more liquid and society more atomized, the political problem of how to get members of the public to recognize each other as members of the same polity arises. Liberal democracies, Prof. Lilla said, have not thought much about how to develop this national sense of solidarity. In the past, it was fueled by common language, ethnicity or religion. Moreover, western democracies have frequently relied, at various points in history, upon crises and war to constitute a sense of “we.” Prof. Lilla argued that it’s important for liberal thinkers, and liberals in general, to show a little more respect toward their cultural and religious heritage so that those feelings of “we” can be exploited to progressive ends. Without a sense of common unity and social solidarity, free-floating emotions may attach themselves to something else like populism.

Prof. Snyder put his focus on the circumstances commonly present that lead to populist preferences and attitudes. To do so, he sought to add the idea that populist movements perceive a situation of crisis. The populist movement views business as usual and existing elite structures as part of the causes of this crisis. Those existing structures at fault need to be urgently swept away to deal with the day-to-day crisis that the populace feels intensely, in the populist’s view. This can help to explain why laws and bureaucracy need to be swept away, why there needs to be a strong leader to act decisively

in response, and it also explains the “belligerent, boorish, uncouth style” of populist movements, because they think that politeness is part of the problem, Prof. Snyder argued. “It’s the way that the mainstream elites play rope-a-dope with the masses that are complaining,” Prof. Snyder said.

Discussions around populism and nationalism often begin by pointing to the movements’ xenophobia, but this outward expression of populism, in many cases, relates to something underlying that has really occurred—like mass migration or a foreign threat—according to Prof. Snyder. Another common explanation of where populism comes from is globalization. The people who are losers in globalization or automation—people who think they’re falling behind—see it as unfair because they are, after all, “the true people” who should be the beneficiary of the nation’s progress. But one can peel these layers off more to get at the circumstances against which people are rebelling. At this level, there’s always an issue of governance. Prof. Snyder argued that the main cause of populism is a governance structure that is not adequately dealing with whatever the perceived problem or crisis is—whether it’s migration or globalization. Often, the government is viewed as the stimulus of these issues. Moreover, the people feel there’s no way for the people to hold their elites accountable.

For Prof. Snyder, underlying the governance complaint and the governance narrative is liberalism’s failure to keep its own house in order. The liberal state—with institutions of Keynesian economics, welfare state support for broad masses of the population, together with international institutions that facilitated stable cooperation among capitalist economies—has been eroded as a result of libertarianism, rational markets theory and deregulation since the 1980s. That has limited liberalism’s ability to make the political moves needed to win over the people who otherwise would be, and have now become, the populists.

Then we must ask, is populism by definition exclusionary and xenophobic? Or is there such a thing as a good populism—a populism that is also able to speak to a mass of truly unrepresented people, and is, therefore, a perfectly legitimate response to the failures of representational democracy? On this point, the panelists disagreed.

Prof. Urbinati argued that all populism is bad. Because even if there is an intention of representing “the forgotten many,” there is a weaponization of the public’s symptoms of distress. Instead of addressing the causes of that distress, populism instead focuses on rash decisions in the here and now—or a presentism that does without building an argument or devising a strategy for future solutions. It eschews a pluralist framework for solving collective issues. Instead, all strategies are usable. This component of populism, in Prof. Urbinati’s view, makes the deployment illiberal tactics possible and makes possible violations of many conditions for a tolerant political discourse in democracy. Respect for the op-

position and respect for dissenting ideas are often left behind. Instead, there is an erosion of the legitimacy of institutions.

Prof. Snyder had a different idea. In his view, populism is negative when it happens in countries with weak institutions, rules, and processes, or when it serves to undermine them and destroy them. It's bad when it excludes minorities or even majorities who are not viewed as belonging to the populist's conception of "the people." Populism is less problematic when it really is supportive of the majority of the people but in a way that gives a voice to those who are unheard and finds a way to plug back into the mainstream. These populist movements often find a way to have a symbiotic relationship with a progressive mainstream party. Some examples include the 19th Century Abolitionists and the Republican Party of President Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King and the Democratic Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, and Gandhi and the Congress Party in India. However, this has to happen in a context in which institutions are strong and inclusive, Prof. Snyder argues. The crucial requirement is to have rules of the game that make this work fairly.



The questions from the audience for the panel from the audience asked what indicators can be used to measure populism and discontent, whether society "suffers" from too much stability and normality that fracture the collective sense of national unity, and if it's economic or cultural conditions that more so lead to the "amorphous discontent" Prof. Lilla described.

Prof. Snyder began by saying that a good way to measure populist movements is their ability to package together various dimensions of public dissatisfaction that provides the public with an outlet for their discontent. Populist movements that fail to present a coherent story and set of attitudes towards public grievances—whether it's the economy or immigration—are often ineffective and short-lived. Others, like the Republican Party under Trump, have been able to consolidate anti-immigration attitudes into a broader conservative agenda. And once you get a really solid alignment that packages several hot button issues into the same political coalition with a compelling narrative, it's much less likely that movement will burn out quickly.

Prof. Lilla disagreed with the sentiment of the question that asked whether society suffers from too much stability. Instead, it's that the formative institutions and social structures of today's society are in fact liquid. And that leads to discontent. In the United States, Prof. Lilla argued that there are fewer incentives for divesting oneself of their particularity and trying to look beyond, toward common solidarity and duty. Ceremonies, like going to the polls to vote on Election Day and attending events like Memorial Day parades, have

fallen out of favor as people have become more concerned with consumerism and convenience. Prof. Lilla argued that it would be a good thing for people who care about liberal democracy to think about what kinds of ceremonies help to bring people together and give them a sense of purpose.

To the question of whether economic issues cause amorphous discontent, Prof. Lilla urged the audience to avoid assuming the real causes of behavior are, in fact, the most basic causes of behavior. He pointed to conservative supporters of Trump for whom the economy is not the most important thing. Instead, he said they feel discontent because the traditional conception of a white, religious America is disappearing. That becomes a totalizing explanation for the discontent but it's not the material one that relies simply on economic conditions.

Nationalism and Populism: Is Japan the Exception?

Satoshi Machidori, Kiyoteru Tsutsui, Masayuki Tadokoro, Gerald Curtis, Harukata Takenaka, Amiko Nobori and Takako Hikotani

Once the topic of nationalism and populism on the global stage was covered, the second panel of the day turned toward the question of nationalism and populism in Japan or the lack thereof. The panelists of the second panel—Satoshi Machidori, Kiyoteru Tsutsui, Masayuki Tadokoro, Gerald Curtis, Harukata Takenaka and Amiko Nobori—moderated by Takako Hikotani analyzed the status of populist and nationalist sentiment in Japan using a variety of frames of reference. Generally, all of the panelists agreed that populist sentiment is weak in Japan, and they foresee little chance that will change in the short term.

Prof. Machidori approached the topic by analyzing the political market structure of democracies, particularly the political landscape in Japan. That is because the politics of liberal democracies are close to market competition. There are two aspects of the political market structure: demand and supply. On the demand side are socioeconomic changes—automation, innovation, globalization, and mass communication—taking hold across the world, and cultural changes—mass immigration, terrorism and the “clash of civilizations.” Then there is the supply side of the equation, which includes the structures of party politics and the rise of populist leaders. Party politics of industrialized nations have experienced many changes within the past 20 or 30 years. Social democratic parties were hindered by the financial crisis of 2008. This power vacuum leaves open the possibility that charismatic leaders and their new parties can be established quickly, shout loudly and rise in the short term. These changes open the gateway for the acceptance of populist political leaders around the world.

There is, however, a missing link. These introductory explanations of demand and supply don’t necessarily explain missing or unobserved cases of populism—or rather, the unsuccessful cases of populism. We have many, many examples of these kinds of parties everywhere. This is the reason why we need to care about the “political market structure.” That is, political institutions mediate between demand and supply, which can help explain unobserved cases. The market structure of a democratic polity is the product of particular institutions. The electoral rules and separation of powers have specific effects and can affect or blunt the rise of populism.

In the case of the political electoral system, proportionality and its effects on party politics is perhaps the most significant aspect. Low proportionality only allows a small number of competitive parties and decentralized party organizations. On the contrary, high proportionality allows a large number of competitive parties and centralized party organizations.

Another aspect is the nature of the separation of powers within the political system—whether a system is parliamentary or presidential, and more specifically, whether the chief executive is elected by the legislative branch or in a separate election. A presidential system quite often leads to two major party competition, such as in the United States. The legislative branch might provide small parties a chance to survive. The number of parties in the parliamentary system, on the other hand, depends on their electoral system and whether the system is proportional.

The dynamics of these electoral systems and the separation of power affect the manner in which and the likelihood in which a populist may come to power. For example, in the case of the parliamentary system with electoral rules with low proportionality, two major parties often emerge, requiring one or the other to be taken over by populists. In the case of the presidential system with an electorally high proportional system, it means the populist party may emerge on its own as a small party that can then move forward and win the presidential elections in a short period of time. How populists interact with the political party structures and within political competition depends on the system.

The nature of the governmental structures and electoral systems can also provide different stopping points or blockades to the rise of populist power. In the case of the parliamentary system with low proportionality, the major party organizations can avoid being taken over by the populists. On the other hand, in the case of the presidential system, other parties in the legislative branch can stop the populists. The case of the United Kingdom and Brexit can help to illustrate this difference. The Brexit party rose to prominence not within the U.K.’s national parliament but within the European Union parliamentary elections in large part because the E.U. parliamentary election is a high proportionality system. This system allowed the Brexit Party, despite being a small party, to rise quickly. Within Britain, which has a low proportionality electoral system, the major parties could prevent the Brexit party from being a major party. This illustrates a typical path of the populist powers with the parliamentary system and the proportional system.

Next, Prof. Machidori examined the case of Japan, where Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s Liberal Democratic Party—a conservative attitude with relatively mainstream social democratic policies—has enjoyed relatively stable support for the last decade. On the national level, things appear to be stable, but populists have been able to rise at the local, municipal and prefectural levels. This raises the question: If Japanese people are familiar with and sometimes vote for populists

on the local and prefectural level, then why has no populist movement emerged on the national stage? The answer lies within the political market structure of Japanese, which is different between the national and more local levels.

And at the national level, Japan maintains a parliamentary system with electorally low proportionality. This system is advantageous to the major parties including the Liberal Democratic Party and disadvantageous to upstart populist parties. However, on the lower levels of Japanese politics, mayors and governors are elected using the presidential system, in which executives are elected independently from the legislative branch. In this situation, the populists can gain status within a short period by winning executive elections. In addition to the executive elections, the legislative electoral system is highly proportional on the local and prefectural level, and small parties can emerge and survive relatively easily.

A few examples were mentioned. One is the case of Tōru Hashimoto, the governor and mayor of Osaka, whose party is still quite popular in Osaka. Another case is Takashi Kawamura, the mayor in Nagoya, a small business owner and a member of parliament who took on the council and ran on anti-taxation as his major policy. His party is clearly tapering and is quite weak. Then there is the case of Yuriko Koike, the current governor in Tokyo, who tried to do some minor populist policies in Tokyo and her party is also tapering. The final case is Yukiko Kada, the former governor of Shiga Prefecture, an environmental activist and professor, who leveraged some minor but famous green policies in Shiga. Her party was short-lived.

The structures and institutions of Japanese politics prevent populists from launching a successful populist party on the national level; thus, the populists would need to co-opt one of the major parties, particularly the Liberal Democratic Party, in order to take power in the national government. That simply has not happened. So, national Japanese politics are left in a quite stable position compared to the local and municipal levels. Then the next question is this: is from local to national possible in Japan? Prof. Machidori argued that it's a possible but tough path for populists. The current condition of party politics allows the local populists to emerge as national figures, largely because the LDP supporter base is fragile. However, institutional conditions prevent them from rising easily at the national level because the local populists cannot gain enough seats in the parliamentary elections. In the case of Japan, although the situation and party politics may allow the rise of a populist movement, the institutional structure blocks them at the national level in particular in the case of the lower house of the National Diet. But institutional blocking is not almighty, and socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions may allow the populists to have a chance.

Prof. Tsutsui followed Prof. Machidori's analysis of the national political and institutional factors by discussing the broader matters of macroconditions that shape populism in Japan: economic security, national sovereignty, and cultural autonomy, arguing that a threat or a perceived threat in these three areas could give rise to populist sentiment.

Economic security is often threatened or is perceived to be threatened by globalization, the loss of jobs to other lower-wage countries through trade deals, or other macroeconomic factors. Populist leaders often use threats to economic autonomy as a powerful tool in politics, blaming the movement of capital on globalist elites—the rich getting richer by shipping jobs to foreign countries with cheaper labor. Another related factor is the perception of economic loss. While it's been fairly well established that inter-state inequality has declined in the last couple of decades, intra-state inequality has grown in a number of liberal democratic countries, including Japan and the United States. Populists capitalize on this rising inequality, fueling popular resentment toward elites to their advantage.

The second element is the perceived threat to national sovereignty. Populists often arise out of the vilification of transnational organizations and external powers that infringe on national sovereignty. For example, populists in Europe have attacked the European Union because they believe that their national sovereignty has been undermined significantly by the EU. This perceived threat is particularly potent when countries accept immigrants and refugees based on international agreements or directives from transnational organizations.

The third element is cultural autonomy, which is often perceived to be threatened by immigration, refugee resettlement, assertion of autonomy by minority groups, and other cultural clashes. Challenges to traditional values and cultural norms can incite powerful sentiments that become a potent weapon in arming the populist movement. These threats need not be real, and perceived and even manufactured threats can be just as effective.

So how do some of those factors apply in Japan today? (It's important to note that Prof. Tsutsui stressed the following as speculative — as he just started a new project on populism that would collect systematic data on all these factors — and he asked his colleagues to provide additional insight if their data did not match his views.) First, on economic security or the threat thereof: Japan, it seems, tends to benefit more from international trade, or at least there is the perception that Japan is doing well in international trade. Japan has successfully protected domestic markets for their staples with trade barriers. And despite some recent changes in the Trans-Pacific Partnership and other free trade agreements, key industries have been well protected. Moreover, the shrinking population in Japan alleviates concerns about Japanese workers' employment prospects and the impact of immigration on

the labor market. The possibility of a labor shortage seems to be a greater concern in Japan. The second factor in economic security is inequality. Relative to other countries, economic inequality in Japan is subdued even as it has risen in recent years. Moreover, there is a very strong norm that those who are wealthy avoid ostentatious or conspicuous consumption, which moderates resentment toward economic elites. While some changes might happen with a growing number of trade agreements and the growth of economic inequality, for now, it seems that this is not becoming a factor strong enough to give rise to populist sentiments.

On the second issue of national sovereignty, it's important that there's no regional transnational organization that's pushing its way in Japan like the European Union in Europe. While the United Nations and other transnational organizations do exert some pressures on Japan, generally speaking, there is a strong desire, among Japanese leaders to be recognized as a legitimate global power. So, Japan has been receptive to requests and criticisms from these organizations. This desire to be recognized in the world, regularly seen in many popular TV shows in Japan today, can attenuate the possible threat that people might perceive in regard to the loss of national sovereignty. Prof. Tsutsui stressed that populist nationalism does exist in anti-China or anti-Korea discourse especially around territorial issues. Furthermore, the United States could provoke arguably the greatest populist nationalism in Japan, considering the history between the U.S. and Japan – including the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – and the U.S. military presence in Japan, particularly in Okinawa. But the US-Japan relationship has been managed fairly well, and the negative sentiment that Japan's national sovereignty is disturbed or undermined by the United States is not that widespread. In this regard, it doesn't help that President Donald Trump repeatedly demands more cost-sharing by Japan in the U.S.-Japan military alliance.

On the third issue of cultural autonomy, it's important to recognize that the scale of immigration and refugee resettlement is much smaller in Japan than in other advanced democracies. Accordingly, threat or perceived threat from those generalized others—foreign people coming in and changing Japan's mainstream culture—is relatively moderate. Furthermore, values politics is not as divisive an issue as with abortion, gun control and so on in the U.S., because the mainstream Japanese culture goes largely unchallenged. Nonetheless, political discourse that blames minorities for claiming “too many rights” or immigrants for receiving “special treatment” does exist, and if it grows, then these sentiments might fuel populism. Gender issues—sexual orientation and gender inequality—seem to be percolating up to the national political stage, and if it continues to gain traction, they might become a sort of values issue that would divide Japanese society in the future, giving rise to populism if these gender norms are successfully framed as Western and hence

threats to Japanese culture. But, in general, the Japanese public does not seem to be overly concerned about threats to cultural autonomy of the mainstream Japanese.

Finally, for populists to become successful, they often need enemies that personify those threats, and entrenched elites—“the deep state,” “globalists,” and “the mainstream media”—are easy targets. In Japan, bureaucrats would fit the bill, but after the failure of the Democratic Party of Japan—which criticized and tried to take power away from bureaucrats, and to that extent might be seen as a populist movement—it became hard to vilify bureaucrats and deny them power. Also important to note is the corporatist political arrangement in Japan in which the Liberal Democratic Party successfully incorporated grievances from various stakeholders, thus preventing pent-up frustrations from erupting into a populist uprising. There are some concerns about the independence of media, but the kinds of populist attacks to discredit mainstream media seen in the U.S. do not exist in Japan on the same scale. These things could all change, but as of now, lack of major threats along the three factors discussed earlier and relatively high levels of faith in elites have prevented a sudden surge of populism in Japan.

Prof. Tadokoro agreed that there is no doubt that in Japan there is less populism than in western countries, particularly on the national level. But he argued that Japan is not behind, but rather it is a bit ahead because the DPJ (The Democratic Party of Japan) government in 2009-2012 may be considered a populist government in the sense that it was anti-establishment and anti-bureaucracy. They, for example, tried to bypass regular legislative processes for budget allocation and resort to mass mobilization by holding televised open forums where elite bureaucrats were grilled. But the current situation in Japan, particularly on the national level, is that the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) is particularly stable largely because people feel completely disillusioned by the DPJ's performance.

Why is it that the Japanese electorate appears to be more at home with an establishment party? Japan does not have the kind of divisive political issues that some countries have—like the big government, small government confrontation in the United States. There is no such thing in Japan. Gun control issues and abortion rights are not really issues in Japan. Until recently, security policy was the most divisive political issue, but over the last 30 years, that division was very much attenuated—largely because the largest opposition party until the 1990s, the pacifist socialist party, is practically gone. So, in a sense, national unity may have been improved, which is not the case in many other countries experiencing populist uprising.

On immigration, Prof. Tadokoro stressed that it is not true that Japan doesn't have any immigrants. According to the

United Nations, Japan has 2.5 million immigrants, which is about 2% of the total Japanese population, almost equal to the whole of Kyoto prefecture. But it seems to have not become as controversial as in other western countries. However, the country is still at an early stage of receiving immigrants because until recently, Japan was a country of emigration. Finally, Prof. Tadokoro added that within the past 30 years, Japan experienced two major earthquakes, and even by Japanese standards, experiencing two major earthquakes, each of which killed thousands of people in little more than 15 years' time, is rather unusual. Natural disaster sometimes creates a sense of unity.

One of the biggest particular problems for Japan is mounting public debt. The Japanese economy practically stopped growing over the last two decades. However, the living standard has not deteriorated significantly, and Japanese inequality has not been widening to the same degree as in other developed countries. This is partly because of compensation to people by the government has remained at a high level even though the Japanese government has not raised taxes significantly. But there is now mounting public debt. If or when things go wrong, Japan might end up forced to increase taxes, which is politically difficult; reduce dramatically services provided by government, which is also problematic; or face hyperinflation, which will have devastating impacts on the whole population. Moreover, the Japanese people have begun questioning the reliability of American security. And what will the government be willing to do if Japan is no longer provided security by the Americans? This is a question that has not been an issue over the past three decades, and if Japan is forced to produce an answer, that answer may be divisive and ignite very nasty populism or nationalism.

The first commenter, **Dr. Nobori**, pointed to issues in the United States and elsewhere that show that populists often attack a country's sense of unity and its bureaucratic and institutional structures. She asked the panelists to consider what an appropriate balance of leadership and autonomy of political institutions may mean.

The second commenter, **Prof. Curtis**, argued that it's not that the Japanese public is so well satisfied with the operations of its government and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party that there's no pressure for change, or that there isn't some kind of populist pressure from below. There is much about the political system that leaves the public dissatisfied. The question is this: Why doesn't this dissatisfaction manifest itself in the form of a powerful opposition to the ruling party? An important element in the answer is that concerns about elitism or anger over political scandals take second place to other concerns, about social stability, economic growth, and national security. Prof. Curtis argued that the Japanese public does not see a populist revolt as a realistic alternative. Whatever dissatisfaction people have with the current po-

litical situation, there is a pervasive view that radical change probably would make things worse rather than better.

Prof. Curtis agreed with several of the other panelists that Japan has a public debt crisis just waiting to happen. The debt-to-GDP ratio was 253 percent in Japan in 2019, the highest among the advanced industrialized economies (Greece is number two at 183 percent). But if a public debt crisis were to occur, would that be likely to lead to a populist kind of surge, or would it just make people even more conservatively minded? A populist recipe that says "The government should spend more money and not raise taxes even though we have a public debt crisis" is not going to be appealing to many people.

An important reason for populism to be so weak in Japan is that the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party has adopted policies that disarm the appeal of populist messages, and it has refrained from making needed political reforms that would alienate voters. For example, Prime Minister Abe has been in office for seven years. What has he done about in the way of fundamental reform of the national health insurance and pension system and other social welfare policies? The answer is not very much at all. He has let public debt grow and has increased fiscal support for the shrinking but powerful voting bloc of elderly people. The LDP has a history of taking popular policies advocated by the political opposition and making them its own. So as long as it does that and is able to avoid an economic crash, there is not a lot of incentive for voters to support other politicians or other parties.

So, the question is what could turn the public against an LDP government that isn't really all that popular, but seems to be the best option Japan has got at the time? One would be demonstrated incompetence. The LDP's basic strength is that it is seen as a competent steward of the economy. Support for the party does not have the deep roots it had in earlier years. Rather, there is a fragility to its support that would be revealed if it showed it was unable to effectively manage a crisis situation. This is why the coronavirus epidemic is so politically dangerous for the Abe government. The government's policy to quarantine passengers on the Diamond Princess cruise ship was an abysmal failure that resulted in the ship having the largest concentration of people stricken by the virus outside of China. If the coronavirus epidemic spreads in Japan, and the government is not effective in containing it, that could have a big impact on people's attitudes about the competence of the government and its support for the ruling party.

In conclusion, Prof. Curtis said that political stability and the weakness of populism in Japan comes down to the value Japanese attach to maintaining social unity—to the sense that, "Even though we may not be quite like everybody else in the boat, we're all still in the same boat." The "us against them" divisions that fuel the populist appeal elsewhere are very weak in Japan. Cultural factors matter in condition-

ing the Japanese response to the world, and it's a cultural response that is conservative and risk averse and that feeds the fear that big changes are more likely to have negative rather than positive consequences. Of course, anything can happen in politics, but it is highly unlikely that populism will become a powerful political force in Japan. The evidence would suggest that what you see is pretty much what you're going to get for some time to come when it comes to the nature of the political competition, or the lack thereof, in Japan.



The first comment from the audience came from Prof. Takenaka, who asked about Japan's success in preventing the rise in populism. Has it been a success? And if so, has it been a success because the government under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has provided free childcare and free education? Have these redistributive programs been preemptive? Moreover, the questioner asked why populism has been isolated to some urban areas in Japan like Osaka and Nagoya? Prof. Machidori answered that at the local level, the local government does not have the resources as the national government. The national government still has the resources to cover and take care of the people. The LDP and the Abe government have been able to distribute government resources to these people who might otherwise be tempted toward populism. This is why one can easily find the populists on the local levels, where issues may go unaddressed because local governments do not have the resources to answer the problems.

The next question from the audience related to Prime Minister Abe and what will happen when he steps down from power. What has kept populists from overtaking the LDP and why wouldn't that happen when Abe steps down? Prof. Machidori answered that after the Abe era, the LDP may very well have a very tough time, but may remain strong because the opposition party is too weak and will be weak for some time to. The situation is unlikely to change within the short term. A potential debt crisis or financial crash of Japanese government could pose a problem.

The next question asked whether one could say that Japan has no populism because it has already provided all of the things that populism wants? There's not as much social liberalism—in terms of perceived threat to the prevailing culture—as there is in many western countries, and there is an economy that is winning international trading, producing high-quality products that are tangible, and protecting industries. Is there no populism because it is the perfect populist state? Prof. Tsutsui answered that while the LDP has certainly not satisfied everyone about everything, it has successfully stolen the opposition parties' thunder by adopting appealing policies proposed by them. Many of the welfare policies mentioned earlier came from opposition parties,

and then the LDP shrewdly took them and made them their own. Prime Minister Koizumi framed himself as the opposition within the LDP and won elections with an arguably populist message of breaking up the LDP from within. And to go back to Prof. Nobori's point about the power balance between politicians and bureaucrats, the effort to weaken bureaucrats' hold on power started under the DPJ regime but the LDP perfected it to empower the prime minister's office, reaping a lot of benefits from it. LDP has been shrewd in changing Japanese political systems and policies in a way that prevents massive discontent from becoming an engine that powers political populism and nationalism.

Prof. Tadokoro added that, according to many surveys, over the last 20 years Japan's subjective level of happiness has improved. And the Japanese are largely content with the current life. Despite the slight stagnation of the current economy. But the sustainability of existing the lifestyle is very much a question that creates enormous anxiety. Particularly when the population is aging and declining. Japan is fine now. But how much longer can this continue?

Nationalism and Populism

Columbia University, US, February 10, 2020

Nationalism and Populism around the world

Moderator:

- **Alexander Stille**, San Paolo Professor of International Journalism, *Columbia University*

Speakers:

- **Mark Lilla**, Professor of Humanities, Department of History, *Columbia University*
- **Nadia Urbinati**, Kyriakos Tsakopoulos Professor of Political Theory, *Columbia University*
- **Jack Snyder**, Robert and Renée Belfer Professor of International Relations, *Columbia University*

Is Japan an Exception?

Moderator:

- **Takako Hikotani**, Gerald L. Curtis Associate Professor of Modern Japanese Politics and Foreign Policy, *Columbia University*

Speakers:

- **Kiyoteru Tsutsui**, Professor of Sociology, *University of Michigan*
- **Masayuki Tadokoro**, Professor of International Relations, *Keio University, Tokyo, Japan*
- **Satoshi Machidori**, Professor of Law, *Kyoto University's Graduate School of Law*

Commentators:

- **Gerald Curtis**, Burgess Professor Emeritus of Political Science, *Columbia University*
- **Amiko Nobori**, Visiting Scholar, Political Science, *Columbia University*
- **Harukata Takenaka**, Professor of Political Science, *National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies*



Satoshi Machidori is Professor at Kyoto University's Graduate School of Law. Earned his PhD in political science after doing graduate work at Kyoto University and taught at schools including Osaka University before arriving at his present post. Specializes in comparative political studies and American politics. His works include *Seitō sisutemu to seitō soshiki* (Party Systems and Party Organizations) and *Daigisei minshushugi: "Min'i" to "seijika" o toinaosu* (Representative Democracy: A Reconsideration of the Public Will and Politicians).

the 'Britain' of Asia", in David Wolff et al., eds., *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective* (Brill, 2007). He also edited with David Welch and Yoshihide Soeya, *Japan as a 'Normal Country': A Nation in Search of Its Place in the World*, (Toronto U.P. 2011).



Kiyoteru Tsutsui is Professor of Sociology, Director of the Center for Japanese Studies, and Director of the Donia Human Rights Center at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. His research on globalization of human rights and its impact on local politics has appeared in *American Sociological Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, *Social Forces*, *Social Problems*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, and other social science journals. His book publications include *Rights Make Might: Global Human Rights and Minority Social Movements in Japan* (Oxford University Press 2018), and a co-edited volume (with Alwyn Lim) *Corporate Social Responsibility in a Globalizing World* (Cambridge University Press 2015). He has been a recipient of the National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship, National Science Foundation grants, the SSRC/CGP Abe Fellowship, the Stanford Japan Studies Postdoctoral Fellowship, and other grants as well as awards from American Sociological Association sections on Global and Transnational Sociology (2010, 2013, 2019), Human Rights (2017, 2019), Asia and Asian America (2018, 2019), Collective Behavior and Social Movements (2018), and Political Sociology (2019).



Masayuki Tadokoro is Professor of International Relations at Keio University, Tokyo, Japan. Born in Osaka, he attended Kyoto University and the London School of Economics. Previously he was a professor at the National Defense Academy. In 1988-89, he stayed in Washington D.C. a Fellow of the American Council of Learned Societies, and in 1991 he taught for a semester as Fulbright Scholar in Residence at the University of Pittsburgh. His primary field is international political economy, but he works also on Japanese foreign and security policy. His publications in English include, "After the Dollar?", *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* 10:3 (2010); and "Why did Japan fail to become



Mark Lilla, Professor of Humanities, specializes in intellectual history, with a particular focus on Western political and religious thought. Before moving to Columbia in 2007 he taught in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago and at New York University. A regular contributor to the *New York Review of Books*, he is the author of *The Once and Future Liberal: After Identity Politics* (2017), *The Shipwrecked Mind: On Political Reaction* (2016), *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (2007), *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics* (2001), and *G.B. Vico: The Making of an Anti-Modern* (1993). He has also edited *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin* (2001) with Ronald Dworkin and Robert Silvers, and *The Public Face of Architecture* (1987) with Nathan Glazer. He is currently writing a book titled *Ignorance and Bliss*, and another on the history of the idea of conversion.



Jack Snyder (Ph.D., Columbia, 1981) is the Robert and Renée Belfer Professor of International Relations in the Department of Political Science and the Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies at Columbia. His books include *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War*, with Edward D. Mansfield; *From Voting to Violence: De-*

mocratization and Nationalist Conflict; Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition; The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914. He is editor of several books including *Human Rights Futures* (Cambridge University Press, August 2017), with Stephen Hopgood and Leslie Vinjamuri; *Ranking the World: Grading States as a Tool of Global Governance*, with Alexander Cooley, and *Religion and International Relations Theory*. His articles include “The Modernization Trap,” *Journal of Democracy*, April 2017, on populist nationalism, and “The Cost of Empty Threats; A Penny, Not a Pound,” *American Political Science Review*, August 2011, with Erica Borghard. Professor Snyder is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and editor of the W. W. Norton book series on World Politics. Professor Snyder received a B.A. in Government from Harvard in 1973 and the Certificate of Columbia’s Russian Institute in 1978.



Nadia Urbinati (Ph.D., European University Institute, Florence, 1989) is a political theorist who specializes in modern and contemporary political thought and the democratic and anti-democratic traditions. She co-chaired the Columbia University Faculty Seminar on Political and Social Thought and was a co-editor with Andrew Arato of the academic journal *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory*. She is a member of the Executive Committee of the Foundation Reset Dialogues on Civilization.

She has been a member of the School of Social Sciences of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton University, and a Laurance S. Rockefeller Visiting Fellowship in the University Center for Human Values, Princeton University. She is permanent visiting professor at the Scuola Superiore de Studi Universitari e Perfezionamento Sant’Anna of Pisa (Italy), and taught at Bocconi University (Milan), SciencesPo (Paris) and the University UNICAMP (Brazil).

She is the winner of the 2008-9 Lenfest/Columbia Distinguished Faculty Award. In 2008 the President of the Italian Republic awarded Professor Urbinati the *Commendatore della Repubblica* (Commander of the Italian Republic) “for her contribution to the study of democracy and the diffusion of Italian liberal and democratic thought abroad.” In 2004 her book *Mill on Democracy* (cited below) received the David and Elaine Spitz Prize as the best book in liberal and democratic theory published in 2002.

Professor Urbinati is the author of *Me The People: How Populism Transforms Democracy* (Harvard University Press, 2019); *The Tyranny of the Moderns* (Yale University Press 2015); *Democracy Disfigured: Opinion, Truth and the People* (Harvard University Press, 2014); *Representative Democracy: Principles and Genealogy* (University of Chicago Press, 2006), and of *Mill on Democracy: From the Athenian Polis to Representative Government* (University of Chicago Press, 2002). She has edited Carlo Rosselli, *Liberal Socialism* (Princeton University Press, 1994); Piero Gobetti, *On Liberal Revolution* (Yale University Press, 2002). She co-edited several books, in particular: with Monique Canto-Sperber *Le socialisme libéral: Une anthologie; Europe-États-Unis* (Éditions Esprit 2003); with Alex Zakaras, *John Stuart Mill’s Political Thought: A Bicentennial Reassessment* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); with Stefano Recchia, *A Cosmopolitanism of Nations: Giuseppe Mazzini’s Writings on Democracy, Nation Building and International Relations* (Princeton University Press, 2009); with Steven Lukes, *Condorcet’s Political Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 2012); with Carlo Invernizzi-Accetti, *Hans Kelsen’s On the Worth and Values of Democracy* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2013); with Lisa Disch and Mathijs van de Sande, *The Constructivism Turn in Political Representation* (Edinburg University Press, 2019).



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