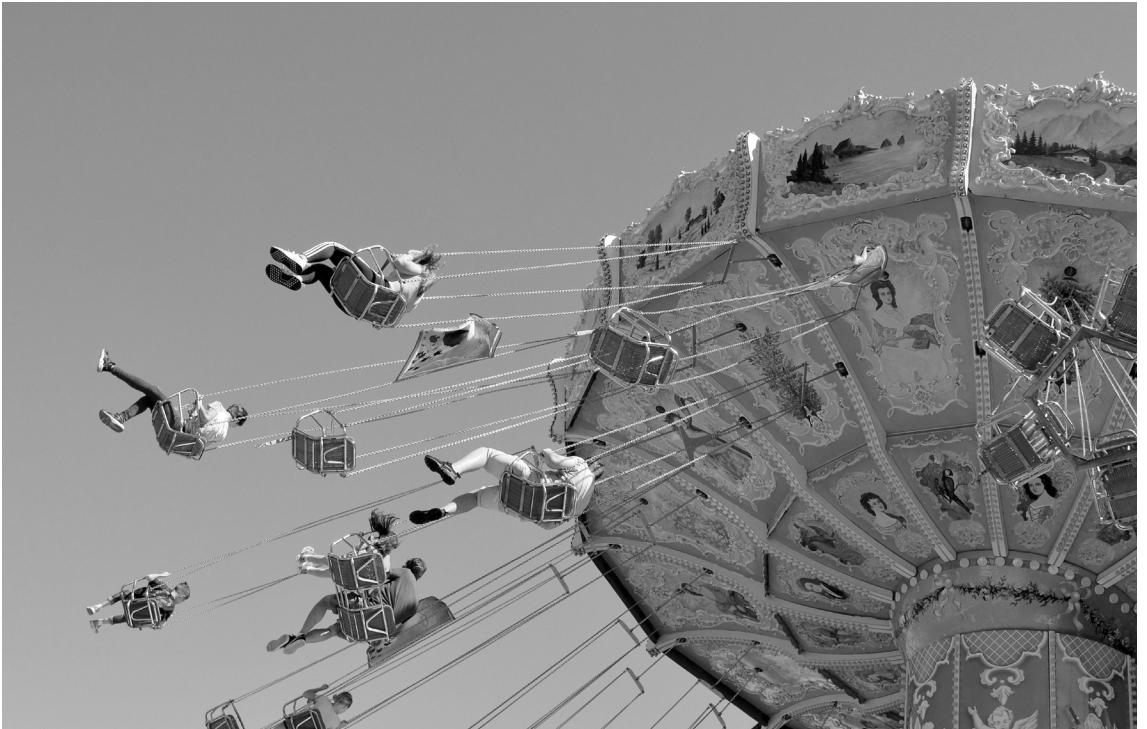


The Centrifugal Civilization and Challenges for Progressive Policy NGOs

Petr Lebeda



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“We’re falling off the centrifuge!” This is how many people increasingly feel in the Western civilization. This is also why they have been casting votes for political parties and movements undermining democracy and space for civil society. Pluralist democracy cannot survive without a solid center of society. Such a space functions as a center if different worldviews can and do safely co-habit there and meaningfully collaborate on resolving common challenges. Maintaining such a societal space – key for civil society – requires a mindset among leaders capable of including and transcending not only various identities, specializations or ideologies, but also various stages of mental and cultural evolution present within both individuals and societal groups.

Conservative, populist and extremist streams (populist backlash) have kept on spreading across most of Western politics during the past couple of years. Clearly this is about more than a few mishandled election campaigns. The populist backlash is here to stay for some time, and progressive circles, including politically-active NGOs, will be increasingly targeted by these movements in both politics and society.

The urge to write this paper was driven by two major questions: First, why has there been so strong an onset to this backlash so fast and across so many countries? Second, how might we as NGOs advocating progressive policies have been complicit, and what can we do to address the deeper causes of this backlash in the longer term? A glaring absence of vision especially seems to both frustrate many efforts at a positive response and to accelerate the societal backlash against those in leadership positions. If we do not want to go backward, we need to go forward.

These reflections take the form of a think piece. Its point is neither an exhaustive analysis of populism, nor a practical blueprint for Progressive Policy NGOs. Rather, it points to a bridge between the two. The aim is to outline the bigger picture so we can reframe our approach. It is being offered for the strategic reflection and self-reflection by the particular segment of NGOs the author is most familiar with in the hope that if properly elaborated, this vision could inspire a change of mindset even beyond civil society. No doubt the concluding suggestions require more country- and theme-specific research, practical verification and further critical reflection, which is also what we plan to do with colleagues in the Czech Republic.

Many of the debates reflecting on the current political situation are quite grim. Even though we have more information about what is happening inside our societies, we do not seem to know where to go from here. Therefore, the ambition here is to synthesize bits and pieces of wisdom from some of the brightest minds of contemporary sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, history and other disciplines.

The resulting synthesized – Integral – approach rests on the assumption that the evolution of the human mind and human societies moves in stages, from more self-centered and closed worldviews to more complex ones that are more responsible for the common good. The norms of

a society are determined by the evolutionary stage of its leaders, so this is primarily a challenge for politicians. Yet they can only succeed if business, cultural or civil society leaders move in the same direction.

If the leadership is predominantly ethnocentric, then the Government (and other leaders) are likely to promote their own ethnic, religious, racial and/or other groups and to discriminate against the groups not in power (including women and minorities). If the leadership is at the worldcentric stage, then the laws and institutions are likely to balance not only the needs of various groups in the country, but also the concerns of other nation-states, the environment, and universal human rights.

It therefore seems natural that most people should want leaders at these higher, worldcentric stages to shape and run their countries. Indeed, the democratic West has had such worldcentric leaders in charge of politics, business, culture – and NGOs – for more than three decades. Yet, each stage can have its unhealthy form that provokes resistance. Even smart leaders can get stuck and can fall into excesses and contradictions.

The strong, fast onset of the populist backlash across the West likely signals such resentment against leadership not necessarily because it was not more complex and responsible than the rest of society (although many traditional political parties are now punished as they did care more for their own benefit than that of the electorate), but because it has both not delivered and overshot the mark.

The quest for solidarity, equality, civil rights, environmental responsibility and various forms of pluralism is characteristic of the evolutionary stage called Green by integral theories. In recent decades this leadership mindset has brought about not only prosperity for much of society, but in particular it has sparked tremendous changes for the most needy and for minorities both in the West and around the world.

Yet the leaders – and many of us in the Progressive Policy NGOs along with them – overlooked the deteriorating (economic, social and psychological) situation of the mainstream groups (the center of society) in the West and the powerful – centrifugal – side effects of this culture of postmodern empowerment on both the individual psyche and the social order: in particular a relativism sliding into nihilism and narcissism, as well as the parallel fragmentation of society into cultural tribes.

While feeding on the increasing economic unfairness and technological anxiety, both the advancing fundamentalisms (from conservatism to authoritarianism to extremism) and the post-truth society appear to mirror these excesses of the progressive Green mindset-culture. Even worse, the postmodern Green Stage, instead of trying to include and transcend the lower evolutionary stages, has come to despise them (a true elitism).

Hence the resentment of the “bottom 60 %” that feels itself to be the New Marginalized in a Centrifugal Civilization has presented itself as highly emotional, but not irrational. What we witnessed most strongly in the U.S. Presidential elections and the Brexit vote (but also elsewhere) was a backlash against the progressive (Green) leadership of not just one group of society, but a backlash of many groups at lower evolutionary stages (egocentric, ethnocentric and even other worldcentric ones). Anti-progressive (anti-Green) is probably the most fitting description – and a common denominator – of the successful populists such as Trump, Orbán or Zeman, who may otherwise seem highly inconsistent and irrational.

Such a theory of the bigger picture corresponds to the fact that for most researchers the populist wave is hard to explain in either left-and-right terms or in purely socio-demographic categories. Yes, lower educated, lower income, older white males from rural areas are likely to vote conservative and populist, but various other groups vote this way as well. Much research suggests there are important psychological and cultural factors at play, too. This paper high-

lights pervasive existential insecurity, lack of dignity, and too fast a pace of change which are stressing and alienating many people.

Thus what the progressive forces (across society and civilization) need to focus on is not only reactive strategies to respond to the rising extremes, but 1) proactive mending of the center of society and 2) evolving the leadership mindset and culture from Green to more Integral. In another words, we need leaders who better perceive, include and balance the complexities of our world. The current societies are called centrifugal because they are not only polarized, but increasingly fragmented and disruptive. There seem to be fewer and fewer moderately-demanding jobs, fewer shared bases of information, and less cultural and technological stability to support the center of society – and hence the mainstream political parties.

Globalized trade and especially technology have increased job insecurity among the lower and middle classes. Many of these less educated, lower income groups have been struggling with feelings of vulnerability, stress and unfairness, but also of uselessness and low subjective status. These bottom 60% blame the politicians for allowing them to drift too far away from the economic top and too close to the bottom 10% of society. Add to that anxiety, lack of control, and lack of comprehension driven by fast-changing technological and social norms that undermine traditional cultures and challenge their capacities to adapt, even among the upper middle classes. What we get is a very explosive snowball of negative feelings across the majority of Centrifugal Societies. When people feel less and less connected with the center of society – and there is no plausible vision of an alternative, they are easy to exploit by means of populist narratives.

All of these processes are global, well beyond the power of civil society. There is not much NGOs can change about centrifugal economics, technology or media – or the emotions about them – in the short term, except perhaps by showing more empathy for the New Marginalized. Yet we NGOs are being attacked by many of the New Marginalized at the same time and, despite huge differences among national political contexts, we need to defend the space for civil society everywhere in the West.

This is clearly the priority now that calls for our improved ability to effectively connect within the civil society sector, to coordinate our public communication, advocacy and policy activities with each other, to reach out to and mobilize other actors in society who care about the basic principles of democracy. These need to be underpinned by continuous research into, analysis of and reflection on the broader societal and civilizational developments.

On top of that, however, especially in the **longer term**, we NGOs need to regain public trust, support and influence in the face of smear campaigns, stigmatization and even the criminalization of NGOs. We can certainly help counter these trends by concentrating our further efforts in the centripetal rather than the centrifugal direction. One key strategic shift would amount to a grand bargain – protect the weakest by placing a stronger focus on all those who are just slightly better off (but feel miserable). Another shift would be about showing more Integral leadership in our own work and in society through becoming more rooted in the society and various types of facilitation and networking (from constituency building to thematic and functional networks to cross-sectoral networks to networks of networks).

Apart from trying to understand and explain the bigger picture and offering a positive, inclusive vision, NGOs thus can (and often already do) reconsider their:

- **Language** – from dry, abstract and too rational to more concrete, engaging and emotional, appropriate to different stages of worldview evolution
- **Formats** – listen, discuss and connect more, preach and convince less
- **Claims** – relax or do a better job of targeting the most controversial policy agendas

- **Constituency** – establish stronger roots and receive corrective feedback by reaching out to partners outside the “progressive bubble”
- **Funding** – tap more private and more domestic sources to become more resilient and legitimate
- **Target groups** – broaden the scope from the bottom 10% to the bottom 60%, but also support transformation from pretentious elitism to true Integral leadership across the society
- **Agendas** – focus on (symbolic) status and psychological support, rather than just on (material) justice
- **Goals** – apart from protecting the basic pillars of plural democracy, focus on development of a more Integral mindset and culture

I. Call to Deeper (Self-)reflection

The significant simultaneous rise of conservative, populist, extremist and authoritarian politics¹ is one of the most troubling phenomena in the Western societies of the early 21st century. However, it is also an acute **opportunity** to reflect more deeply and more honestly on the deficiencies of an approach that many of us in the politically-active NGOs² have long advocated.

This intensifying populist wave **threatens** to deteriorate the situation of fragile groups and to reverse 20th century achievements in a number of social and environmental policy areas such as migration, gender equality, social inclusion or climate change, as well as many other achievements we deeply care about.

Yet the possibility of **cohesive governance** to resolve complex challenges is ever more truncated by the continuation of our divisive, fragmented approach to social life, presenting an even bleaker outlook for much of democracy, both in the West and in the world beyond.

Let us set aside the intellectual pride that is so common in our “progressive bubble” for a while and listen carefully, with both our **minds and our hearts open**, to this very strong message of increasing resentment about the way our societies are run. We may not only better understand what is actually going on, but we may also find guidance about how to overcome this crisis from the underlying web of emotions, reactions and concerns.

Civil society is not necessarily under fire as a whole sector across the Western democracies, and it is not under fire in the same way in all places. The critique of the **Progressive Policy NGOs** that are the main target group of this paper (along with the critique of mainstream political parties, media and experts) comes not only from the populists, but also from members of many civic associations such as hunters, sports clubs, firemen or the large faith-based/conservative NGOs. However, the critique tends to spread beyond the most-targeted “political NGOs”, and growing distrust has been faced by service-delivery and many other kinds of NGOs as well.

Regardless of their mission and format of work, most Progressive Policy NGOs work for rather low wages and regularly criticize the establishment – local and national governments,

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- 1 There are various definitions of populism. Some authors such as Müller (2017) argue populism is not only anti-elite, but also inherently anti-pluralistic with authoritarian tendencies. Some populists can respect democratic pluralism, but have extremist forms of denying universal human rights. Others such as Goodhart (2017) speak of “decent” populism (meaning rather cultural conservatism) as a natural, potentially positive, corrective force in society. I’m trying to use specific terms where appropriate, but the main goal is to analyze the broad phenomenon that includes all of these political streams. Therefore, *populist backlash or populist wave* is used as an overarching term for this broad phenomenon.
 - 2 As will be explained later, the focus is mostly on a specific subgroup of civil society organizations, the professional NGOs actively entering the public space with the goal of influencing various policies, most notably on gender, social, racial, religious and ethnic equality; on migrant, sexual minority and other minority and human rights; and on humanitarian and development, environmental, anti-corruption and pro-democracy policies.

the EU and international institutions – on many issues of public interest. Why, then, are we seen as **part of the establishment**, of the so-called elites?

Why are we increasingly **distrusted by conservative and populist voters** and despised by voters of the extremist and authoritarian parties – even if many Progressive Policy NGOs work to help the weak or abused? Is this all just an irrational wave of various pent-up emotions, or is there a deeper rationale going on that we fail to see? Is this just a temporary diversion on the otherwise stable path of liberal democracy's evolution, or might we be witnessing a more substantial, permanent societal transformation?

These are just some of the questions boggling the minds of Progressive Policy NGO strategists, fundraisers, policy and communication officers as well as many regular NGO workers. On top of dealing with additional challenges stemming from working in a less friendly environment, many of us now have to **defend our profession** even at family meetings or primary school class reunions.

The good news is that **reflection is underway**. Quite a few of those under attack tend to abandon the simplistic perception that we not very aptly labeled liberals are defending civilizational values and democracy against the illiberal pagans. I hear more and more colleagues in civil society agree by now that the way to heal social wounds is to build bridges between and among the main opposing camps. However, the new cleavage, or rather cleavages, are far from clear-cut.

In the analysis below, the populist wave or backlash is taken as a **symptom of broader societal challenges** rather than an isolated or even supremely political problem. With so many Euro-Atlantic countries being affected simultaneously, this backlash against mainstream leadership is clearly a phenomenon of the **whole of Western civilization**.

However, given the global impact of economic, technological and social forces, many of these challenges are being experienced on other continents as well. In fact, the disruption of the social order described below was probably experienced in the **non-Western world** more strongly and earlier than in the West itself. Research along these lines, which is unfortunately outside the scope of this think piece, would surely prove quite informative for the topic at hand.

This think piece reviews a range of various disciplinary perspectives (not just politics, but also economics, technology, history, philosophy, psychology and cultural anthropology) to build a bigger picture and synthesize what seems to be an emerging consensus about the core of the problem and the basic first steps forward.

While more evidence and analysis obviously is needed, it is still important to provide some **orientations for the further work** of Progressive Policy NGOs and a basic framework for a positive vision at the end of the paper.

Despite several peer reviews, seminars and discussions with a number of academic and NGO colleagues, much of what is presented below rests on the author's own impressions and rather quick conclusions arrived at over the course of the summer and fall of 2018. The concluding suggestions certainly need to be critically assessed against further evidence and subjected to more critical debate.

II. Protesting the Civilizational Centrifuge

Evidence about the **general political trends** over the past decade or so [e.g., Galasso et al., 2017] draws a grim picture: a shift to the right (more conservative and authoritarian) of the political spectrum and in parties, from the center left to the more extremist left, from the center right to the more extremist right, but also the left escaping into right-wing populism and right-wing populism taking on elements of the left (social) agenda. However, there is one more characteristic of this overall conservative, populist wave that is often insufficiently reflected upon – the ever-weaker center of society.

What is particularly worrisome for any publically-active NGO is the strong rise of **right-wing extremist and authoritarian parties**, as they threaten the rule of law, pluralism, the right to free speech and free assembly, and other basic principles of democratic governance. The Progressive Policy NGOs advocating for gender and interracial equality, the universality of human rights, solidarity with the poor at home and abroad, or protection of the environment, however, are also being attacked by conservative parties or conservative and populist streams within parties that otherwise do not undermine democratic rule.

The occurrence of a populist backlash simultaneously **across more than 30 countries** as diverse as the United States, Sweden, Poland and Turkey makes it clear that there is something bigger at stake than one country's politics, cultural idiosyncrasies, the economic crisis or (especially the EU's) democratic deficit (for more figures on voting for populist streams see e.g. Galasso et al., 2017, Gidron and Hall, 2017 or Rodrik, 2018).

Breakdown of the Center of Society

The weakening of the center of society, however, is not limited to politics. It reflects a wider range of **centrifugal trends**, most notably in the labor market and communications technology.

Jobs that require average skills, education or cognitive abilities seem to be progressively disappearing. This disappearance is more visible in the highly-globalized, deregulated, technologically-advanced markets, and it is hidden by the current boom phase of the economic cycle, but the **labor market** offers tend to be for either highly-demanding positions or for very simple jobs in the services sector. [Saul 2018]

In general, Western societies seem to also have lost their shared information base. Even outside social media, the competition among various private media outlets has, in many countries, resulted in a situation where no media outlet is followed by a majority of society. The internet and communications technologies in particular have spearheaded further fragmentation of society, especially **social media** with their echo chambers and siloed boxes, "pleasing lies and reassuring falsehoods." [Cadwalladr 2016] However, more broadly, this is also a case of a search engine technology based on rather narcissistic algorithms ("what-people-like" rules) prevailing over fact-based narratives and especially over public broadcast media.

Let us also mention the deliberate attempts of **hostile autocracies** (Russia and, to a lesser extent, China and Iran) to utilize and fuel this discontent and fragmentation in democratic countries.

The recipes mainstream political parties have offered so far may have tackled many particular aspects of today's complex problems, but first and foremost they do not seem to work well enough in the larger picture, often because in their aggregate they do not work for a substantial part of society – be that in an economic or a cultural sense. Secondly, many of the mainstream political parties have become discredited (consider, e.g., the flagrant fall of social democratic parties across Europe) as they progressively turned from being facilitators of civic participation in politics into capturers of the state. As proponents of the **cartel party** concept such as Peter Mair (1997) illustrate, professional, technocratic, self-maintaining political parties engaged in inter-party collusion and strongly relying on state resources are one of the major elements in this crisis of political representation and trust.

Repeated propositions for the provision of more jobs, more trade, more computers or more education are viewed by many resentful protest voters rather as **more of the same**. In fact, vis-a-vis the forces of globalization and technological progress, these voters seem to feel there is not only a lack of interest, but also a lack of power (and control) on the side of national leaders (just as they tend to feel such a lack on their own side, as I will try to explain below). All in all, voters simply don't see much of a choice, as mainstream parties left or right do not differ on the fundamental issues such as economic or social policies and do not seem bothered to deliver on their promises.

The message sent by Western voters – and to the large proportions of votes cast for populist and extremist parties we also need to add at least some of the voices that do not come to the ballot box at all – is a clear one: **mainstream political approaches** no longer work for large parts of society. Inversely, ever-larger parts of society do not feel they are the mainstream in a Centrifugal Society.

Some evidence suggests that **voting patterns** still do not reflect the degree of **resentment in the societies**. The level of distrust in public institutions, traditional political parties, and other societal elites seems higher in some countries than the combined vote for extremist and populist parties suggests.

Many voters of populist, extremist parties realize these politicians do not have **solutions** for the challenges societies are facing today [Lebeda, Menšíková, eds., 2016]. However, in the absence of a plausible alternative, a protest vote – or no vote – may feel like the only way voters can express themselves.

A viable alternative drawing a picture of a preferred future is indeed not on the table, and so politics is filled with alternatives from the past.

Threats and Potential

The antagonizing aspect of populist backlash usually brings about harsher language, tensions, and even violence, but it may not be entirely negative in the longer term.

Historically, populism has always been part of politics. **Simplifying** and framing grand societal themes in a way that allows people to make choices about them is an important tool for all political (indeed, all public) performance, and as such is an element of democracy. Of course, the degree, the style, the atmosphere created, and especially the actual political actions of populism matter a lot, especially where they transgress in the democratic playing field and turn into authoritarianism.

Some social scientists wisely say that the milder forms of populism can be considered a sign of health [Gidron and Hall, 2018] or **evolutionary self-correction** [Wilber, 2016]. Goodhart (2017), in his analysis of Brexit, speaks of “decent” populism and suggests its sentiments and interests could be better accommodated. There is definitely something to learn from the success of the populist and extremist parties, which shows not only the degree of discontent with the current leadership, but also the regrouping of voters.

Voting Behavior Not Sociodemographic

Let us take one of the most straightforward examples of populism, Donald Trump’s 2016 election victory. Since then there has been talk about the white working class in the US [Williamson, 2016] and elsewhere. It surely helps to zoom in on the core voter groups and to describe their main frustrations.

The **voters** of populist and extremist parties tend to be less educated, lower income, to come from dominant race and ethnicity groups, to be usually more male than female, older and rural. This pattern is consistently present across different countries and regions. The problem is that it is not enough to explain the scope and intensity of the current populist wave.

While education is probably the closest proxy indicator of these sociodemographic categories, neither the degree of education obtained nor its combination with other categories have proved conclusive predictors of voting behavior [Gidron and Hall 2017]. Most **standard sociodemographic categories** thus do not seem to explain, or to explain fully, such a surge of voting support for populist and extremist politics and why it is happening now.

Here are some counter-examples: Donald Trump voters were by far not all lower income and lower education – the **median income of a Donald Trump** voter was \$71,000, which is not a lower-middle salary. At the same time, 45% of all women with a university degree voted for Donald Trump and 53% of all white women! Despite Donald Trump’s rampant sexism, the ethnocentric worldview trumped the **gender aspect** [Wilber, 2016, confirmed also by Galasso et al., 2017].

Clearly, there are other factors at play. A much better predictor was, for instance, a feeling of insecurity [see Inglehart below] or anger: 80% of angry voters voted for Donald Trump [Wilber, 2016]. We will return to a discussion of these emotional, cultural factors in the next chapter.

Personalities and Triggers

The exact agenda of the populist and extremist parties, or more precisely, the combination of their appeals to voters, depends on their **“host ideology”**. This can span from the more left-leaning to the more right-leaning, from the more conservative or socialist to even neoliberal. It can and does change over time (Viktor Orbán and Marine Le Pen have both drifted from neoliberal policies to protection of workers).

As will be explained later, whether people vote extremist right or left depends a lot on their personal psychological traits and also on economic class. The low income groups tend to vote left because the left promises redistribution, while the lower middle class tends to vote right because they desire more recognition.

All populist parties respond to **specific national contexts** – the hot issues (**triggers**) in a given time and space (unemployment, terrorist attacks, ethnic tensions, etc.).

There has **always been** and will always be a demand for populists by certain groups of citizens, no matter how stable, responsive or transparent a ruling elite may be. Psychological research shows that support for populist parties comes from certain types of personalities.

The Big Five model of personality describes psychological profiles that “have a genetic component, develop in early childhood, and are relatively stable over time” [Bakker, Rooduin and Schumacher, 2016, p 6]. “Low agreeable” personalities, for instance, are usually **socially conservative**. There is not much to be done, therefore, about these dispositions, and hence not much to be done about the propensity of people with low openness and agreeableness to vote for populist politicians.

Where research has tested the Big Five model correlations with voting behavior (Bakker, Rooduin and Schumacher, 2016, Aicholzer and Zandonella, 2016), lack of **openness** and low levels of **agreeableness** have signaled a strong tendency to vote for populists (both right wing and other host ideologies). In other words, populist parties target people who are a) afraid of risk, of trying new ideas or activities and unwilling to reconsider their beliefs and who are b) egotistical, distrustful of others, intolerant and uncooperative.

However, if these traits are relatively stable, how do we explain the recent increase in people voting for populist, extremist parties? Could a social dynamic cause people with such dispositions but with different voting habits to become supporters of populist or extremist parties? As Aichholzer and Zandonella (2016) suggest, the effect of these personality traits is moderated through **sociopsychological variables / triggers**, such as authoritarianism, social dominance order, or perceived immigrant threats.

Nonetheless, these variables do not equally correlate with support for populism. Authoritarian personalities display obedience to authority, conventionalism, moral absolutism and cynicism. They tend to find a match with some host ideologies (mostly those of right-wing extremists), but not everywhere. [Bakker, Rooduin and Schumacher, 2016] Personalities with social dominance order triggers (see also gender and other social boundaries, p. 28) show a stronger correlation to such ideologies, while those who perceive migration as a threat show the strongest correlation with support for some form of populism.

It is not very surprising, therefore, that the most immediate – and visible – **triggers** for the rising success of the populist wave movements in recent Western politics have been **immigration**, refugees and multiculturalism. These triggers remain basic arguments to this day for Viktor Orbán and to a lesser extent also for Jarosław Kaczyński or Miloš Zeman. Anti-migrant rhetoric not only drives the Swiss, Dutch and Nordic populist parties (Swedish Democrats, True Finns) as well as the entire coalition government in Italy, but it is also quite palpable in Austria and elsewhere. Although primarily directed against a different group of immigrants (the so-called outgroup), this argument was also the strongest undercurrent amongst the Leave voters in the Brexit referendum.

Supply Side

Such triggers are also the main preoccupation not only of extremist, populist politicians, but increasingly also some conservatives. They cannot change people’s personality types, but they can and do try to steer these potential triggers in order to change the voting behavior of those with the respective predispositions to them.

In fact, the host ideology often **changes** with the surrounding context. For instance, the convergence of economic policies between the (center-)left wing and (center-)right wing parties moving rightward left many workers without a party to vote for. Sensing this vacuum, right-wing populist parties first stressed values and identity to these voters, later also adding left-wing economic proposals.

The role of media is crucial and would deserve at least a whole chapter, but such an analysis is beyond the scope of this paper. The landscape of media in the information society

is very rich, with complex functions and dynamics. Some of the main political, economic and technological challenges that demonstrate themselves in the media will be discussed later.

Let me just highlight a few crucial developments beyond the loss of a common information base in Western societies mentioned above: The onset of digital media has deprived professional-quality media both of their role as gatekeepers and of much of their advertising revenues. This has led to a proliferation of media outlets and the decreasing quality of journalism in many countries. Many private media have similar motivations as politicians do – namely, to attract as many readers as possible.

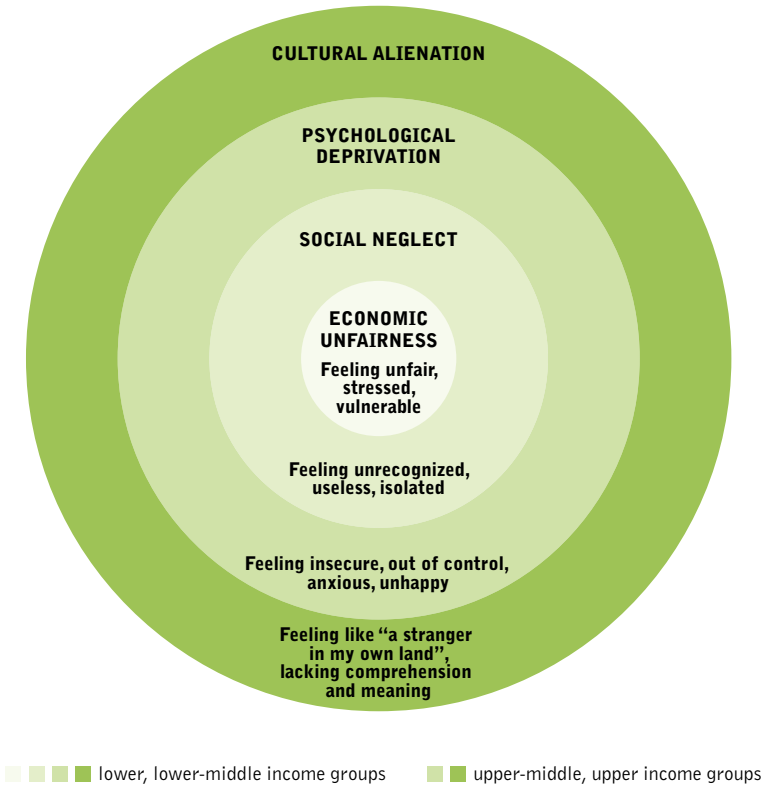
As an Oxfam backgrounder notes, “the dissemination and sometimes **emotional appeal** of negative (and some equivocal) narratives helps to explain shifts in people’s attitudes and (not just voting) behavior” [Galasso et al., 2017., pp, 50–51] It is important to give some thought to why emotional appeals are so much more effective at addressing many voters than are rational, evidence-based arguments. We will look into this in the next chapter.

All in all, it is important to focus on the **supply side** of the populist wave and for the politically active NGOs to name and shame the motivations, objectives and tactics of the extremist and populist politicians as offering just a short-term response [Galasso et al., 2017]. However, supply cannot succeed without corresponding demand. The reactive mode usually holds little promise for the future if it is not accompanied by a proactive focus on the underlying causes of the growing **demand side**. Contemplating explanations of the growing demand for populist movements is where the rest of this text will now venture.

III. Material and Symbolic Disruption

In the previous chapters, it was suggested that if we want to understand the message of the populist backlash we need to discern the motivations of politicians from the concerns of their voters. As standard sociodemographic categories make for unreliable predictors of voting behavior, a more sophisticated explanation of populism is better found in psychological and cultural research.

Figure 1 – The Snowball of Feelings in Centrifugal Society



Source: Author

This, however, does not imply there are no economic and social causes. Rather, in addition to the material determinants of the disruptions in a centrifugal society, we also need to take into account softer, more symbolic perspectives such as values and emotions while looking for the more comprehensive bigger picture that can accommodate all these various variables.

Before we look at this more fitting framework, what is attempted in this chapter is to go deeper into an understanding of what exactly makes the current Western civilization so centrifugal and what might be the rational factors beyond what seems to many to be a massive wave of irrationality.

As Figure 1 suggests, there are various causes for the populist backlash, from more material to more symbolic ones. Each societal problem generates certain negative emotions which then tend to cumulate as layers of frustration and resentment. While the upper socio-economic strata of society face mainly symbolic challenges, the middle and lower strata tend to struggle with all of them.

The last part of this assessment then comes back to the question of what role may have been played by the NGOs promoting progressive policies in uprooting the lifeworlds of many of their fellow citizens.

Disruptive Progress

Clearly there is a large **economic component** to the problem of Centrifugal Society. Above all, this involves stagnating or decreasing real incomes of much of the middle and lower classes over the last three decades, evaporating low-skill jobs, and huge public (and business and personal consumer) debt [Wolf, 2017].

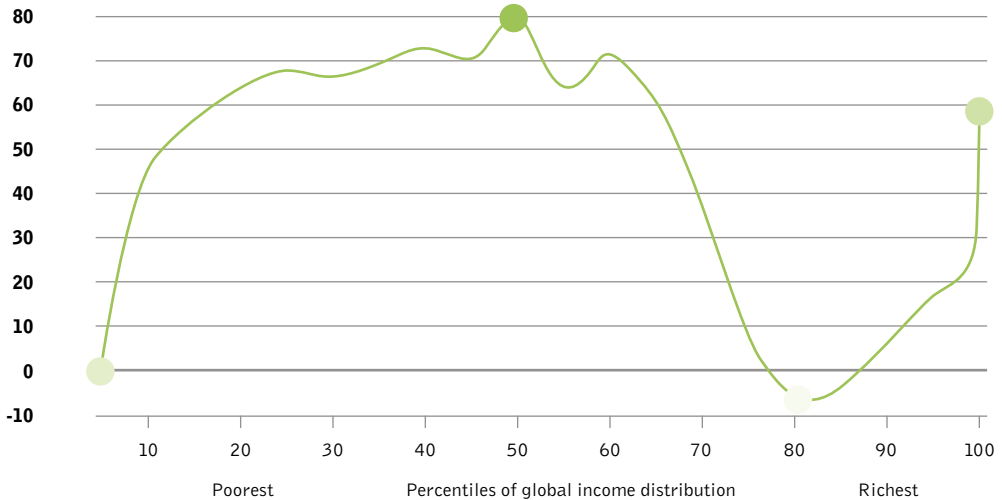
The Shadow of Globalization

Much of this economic-driven deterioration is ascribed to **globalization**, especially the rather overstretched neo-liberal version of it, or “hyperglobalization” as the Harvard economist Dani Rodrik [2018] calls it. Reviewing different economic models, Rodrik adds that any trade liberalization has its winners and losers, and that in the later stages of globalization, “trade agreements become more about redistribution and less about expanding the overall economic pie”(pp.4). This finding helps to explain the growing backlash against globalization over the past few years, even though globalization itself has been around for more than three decades.

Economic studies have documented how this type of globalization, while bringing jobs and wealth to billions of people in developing countries, has been failing the West’s middle and lower income groups (see figure 3 below). Slower growth has also made **income inequalities** emerge more sharply since the 1980s [Piketty, 2015]. The Gini index of economic inequality has increased by 10% on average in the OECD countries.

Figure 2: Winners and Losers of Globalization (the Elephant Graph).

Change in real income, at purchasing power parity, between 1988 and 2008 (%)



LOSERS

- Citizens of rich countries with stagnating incomes, plus much of the population of former communist countries
- The very poor, in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere, where incomes remain almost unchanged over this period

WINNERS

- The very rich. About half are the top 12% of US citizens, also the richest 3–6% from the UK, Japan, France and Germany and the top 1% from Brazil, Russia and South Africa
- The middle classes in emerging economies, particularly China and India

Sources: 1) Lakner, Christoph, and Milanovic, Branko “Global Income Distribution - From the Fall of the Berlin Wall to the Great Recession”, the World Bank Policy Research Working Paper #6719 (December 2013): <https://academic.oup.com/wber/article/30/2/203/2224294>, 2) Galasso, V. Nicholas, Feroci, Gianandrea Nelli, Pfeifer, Kimberly, and Walsh, Martin, “The Rise of Populism and its Implications for Development NGOs”, Oxfam Research Backgrounder series (2017): www.oxfamamerica.org/riseofpopulism

As the graph shows, well-paid manufacturing jobs are subjected to global outsourcing, which is why low-skilled people in the West have problems finding alternative employment. The current **OECD unemployment** rate for those with secondary education or less stands at 12%, while that for those with tertiary education it is only at 5%.

Groups and regions most affected by losing incomes and jobs to **international trade** have never been fully compensated for their losses (although the European safety nets and welfare states have done a much better job of material redistribution than have politicians in Asia, Latin America, or the U.S.).

Technological development is the other challenge. Displaced workers have not really moved up to technologically more advanced jobs. It is increasingly difficult to separate the effects of automation from those of (trade) globalization, but in the U.S., most studies blame the former rather than the latter. [Rodrik, 2018] Inglehart [2018] claims that between 2000 and 2010 over 85 % of U.S. manufacturing **jobs were eliminated by technological advances**, whereas only 13 % were lost to trade.

There is an interesting distinction, however, that Rodrik makes, with the help of psychological research, between economic **inequality and fairness**: “[P]eople understand that unequal abilities, effort, or moral deservingness imply that a fair distribution in society would also be unequal.” [Rodrik, 2018, pp.8]. If you lose your job because your competitor (domestic or global) works harder and invents better products, then you may feel sad, but you probably will not feel disgruntled. If your job is gone because of outsourcing to workers working 12-hour shifts in appalling, socially or morally unacceptable conditions, then anger is hard to avoid.

Last but not least, it is also important to take into account the latest form of globalization. Referring to recent research, Rodrik claims that the consequences of **financial globalization** on investment, growth and financial stability are uncertain and cannot be presumed to be beneficial (pp.9). Currency volatility, debt crises and capital flight have become its regular features. Long thought to be problems in developing countries only, with the publication of the Panama Papers, the fall of Lehman Brothers, the Greek debt crisis and the subsequent austerity measures these problems have proven to be no strangers to the West either.

Capital account liberalization tends to exacerbate the effects of trade liberalization and to cause lasting declines in the labor share of income – with low-skilled workers, who are the least able to move across borders, being the most affected group. A similar logic applies to taxation, where less-mobile activities (income from labor and especially VAT) are taxed more by governments to ensure stability for the public coffers.

What makes all of this even worse, and what makes Western democracies lag behind the growth rates of much of the rest of the world, is the **ageing population**. There are ever-fewer workers for increasing numbers of recipients of the most costly public social services. The already-large public debt (debt-to-GDP ratios are 67% for the EU and 81% for the US) was further aggravated by the 2008–2009 economic crisis, and tax races don’t allow a substantial increase of redistribution for the groups that feel left behind [Zakaria, 2016].

Technological Anxiety

Rapid **technological developments** have not stopped with just replacing low-skilled manufacture and some service jobs (by automation). Now Artificial Intelligence is threatening even high-skilled jobs.

Computers may develop their own consciousness or become intelligent without it. Both would be troubling, as most humans would lose their economic usefulness or control: “99 per cent of human qualities and abilities are simply redundant for the performance of most modern jobs. For **AI** to squeeze humans out of the job market it only needs to outperform us in the specific abilities a particular profession demands.” [Harari, 2017, p. 375]

The easiest replacement of human intelligence by Artificial Intelligence will be in highly **specialized** fields. Complexity management, metacognition and other key competencies are becoming a crucial advantage for workers. However, demanding educational objectives are likely to only add to the feeling of social disruption. Taken all together, this may over time add

to the triggers for anti-system narratives and voting behavior extending far **beyond the lower middle classes**.

The Useless Class

These lost industrial jobs are not simply replaced by other industrial jobs, but are replaced with a range of poor opportunities in the service economy. Many people simply **drop out of the labor** market entirely [Inglehart, 2018].

Industrial workers in particular are losing their negotiation edge with the onset of automation. Even before the rise of robots, however, it was already much harder for people in **rural areas** to get well-paid jobs.

A growing share of well-paid occupations in the OECD countries has been taken by women, while men are not only moving into lower-paid jobs, but into jobs previously dominated by women [Fukuyama 2006, Gidron and Hall, 2018].

Relative to average levels in the population, subjective **social status** as reported by **men without college education** has declined since the late 1980s in 11 of the 12 developed democracies for which data are available [Gidron and Hall, 2017].

People with lower (non-university) educations have not only been pushed into more poorly paid, more precarious work, but at the same time have become **less valued** by prevailing cultural frameworks [Gidron and Hall, 2018].

Culture Clash

Much of the recent research and analysis by sociologists, social psychologists, or cultural anthropologists (such as Fukuyama, Goodhart, Wilber or Williamson) converge around the conclusion that if there are any new classes [Williamson, 2016] or new tribes [Goodhart, 2017] today, they are **cultural**.

Culture is used here not just in the sense of arts and creativity, not just in the sense of traditions, particular food and clothing, but above all in the sense of how people interpret society and their place within it. This concerns shared values, emotions, identities, norms and symbols for the meaning of society – or even civilization – and individuals in it. To a large degree we are talking here about worldviews that also encompass an approach to economic and social affairs. That is why the notion of “cultural” is used as both complementary and superior to the economic, social and psychological angles (see Figure 1).

Culture wars are understood as a symptom (and indeed, an instrument) of the process of formulating new norms for society [Fukuyama, 2006]. Anthony Giddens [1991], for instance, highlights the **search for meaning** in a globalized world that is undermining settled notions of identity and is fraught with anxieties, deep divisions and a feeling of lost control.

This new values-based cleavage has been gradually emerging in Western democracies since the 1960s. Based on Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs”, it has been mostly known as the division between materialist (physical and economic security) vs. **post-materialist values** (driven by autonomy and self-expression). This categorization has been refined or detailed by other authors. The approaches of Chris Rose [2011] (conservative Settlers, pragmatic Prospectors and ethical Pioneers) and David Goodhart [2017] (rooted, traditional Somewheres vs. mobile cosmopolitan Anywheres) are very interesting.

The latter author adds that “while the dividing line between economic and cultural differences is blurred the latter are more difficult to reconcile.” [Goodhart, 2017, p. 226].

The Alienated Tribe

Since the 1970s, due to the constant growth of **post-materialist values**, Western societies have become more inclusive for women, ethnic and other minorities and socially marginalized groups as well as for people with diverse sexual identities.

While we may think it is outdated, the voters of populist, extremist movements still feel alienated not just by today's enhanced equality among races (especially in the United States) and religions (such as the codification of Islam as an equal religion in Germany in 1998), but also by the empowerment of women and ethnic and sexual minorities, as well as by the large social security networks supporting various weaker groups in society (such as the unemployed). Many of these **lower and lower middle** classes also tend to be quite reserved about approving of policies for environmental sustainability (e.g., prevention of climate change, but much less reserved about nature conservation) and, in particular, a certain associated rhetoric that stresses global approaches and/or rather abstract concepts.

As recent Stanford University research suggests, "compared to people who voted to remain in the EU, supporters of Brexit tended to be much more pessimistic about their own economic prospects and more hostile to cultural outlooks of growing prominence in mainstream culture associated with **multiculturalism, social liberalism, feminism and protection of the environment**" [Gidron and Hall, 2017, p. 2].

However, what alienates many men in the lower middle class and turns their anger not just against the establishment, but also against women and these minority groups (and the NGOs that defend their rights) is that women and minorities in the West have, on average, actually benefited more than others from economic development. [Fukuyama, 2006, Gidron and Hall, 2018] In fact, the lower middle class males may now **feel more marginalized** than the groups traditionally classified as below them.

Here are examples of the kinds of questions people in this tribe of the New Marginalized have been asking themselves: Why can governments help all these other groups but not the main group of the nation/ethnicity/religion/race/male gender that I am a part of? If the establishment has their **hands tied** by globalization and technology, then what else is there to do than to vote for someone strong who promises to break the chains?

With decreasing incomes, the increased insecurity of precarious, high-tech-driven economies, and not much help from the state, **distance from the bottom** of society has shrunk for the New Marginalized, while their distance from the upper – especially the upper-middle – layers of society has grown. As Samuel Huntington noted, "... the most politically destabilizing group tends not to be the desperate poor, but rather middle classes that feel they are losing their status with respect to other groups." [quoted in Fukuyama, 2018, Chapter 10, minute 9–10]

These New Marginalized groups also feel they have lost cultural touch with the center of society, as if they were living in a different country from the one they were born into: "You are a **stranger in your own land.**" [Inglehart] It is one thing to earn little but quite another to be treated as a loser, an outsider or an obsolete weirdo. Especially older, less educated, white working class and rural men can hardly relate to the values expressed in the mainstream discourse, such as gender equality, multiculturalism, secular values and LGBTQ rights.

Predominantly coming from the **lower middle classes**, these people are not necessarily poorer in material terms than they were 10 or 20 years ago, but they are definitely more deprived. Mainstream media and politics have barely provided any reason for them to feel they are proud, appreciated members of society – until the populist wave started to take hold of them.

Disruptive Feelings

So this is where **psychological problems** kick in. The combination of uselessness, isolation, neglect and alienation tends to provoke a host of lasting negative feelings in members of this New Marginalized cultural tribe. What might have just begun as stress or discontent turns into anxiety, frustration, resentment and anger. It is no longer just a matter of economic inequality (unfairness) and social exclusion (neglect): Cultural alienation also involves an important element of **psychological deprivation**.

The Emotional Domain off the Leash

The boiling emotions related to these accumulated negative feelings might help to explain the **aggressiveness** of the public political debate and also the fast pace of the onset of the populist wave over the past five years.

What points to larger psychological problems in these Centrifugal Societies is, *inter alia*, evidence of global **epidemics of depression** that have increased 20% over the past 10 years. Although other factors (such as expansion of pharmaceutical business) are at play here, the rapid growth of psychiatric care consumed (80% more patients since 2000) and the use of antidepressants (three times the amount consumed in 2000) in the Czech Republic, for instance, are worth taking into account when analyzing the populist backlash. [Třešňák, 2018].

The focus below is on two of the problematic feelings most mentioned in the literature under review – insecurity and lack of dignity. However, these two feelings appear to combine with feelings of stress, uncertainty and frustration, some of which also stem from an inability to reach a state of happiness in **consumerist society**.

Emotions, which are acute, intense, more immediate expressions of our longer-lasting, lower key feelings. Both are important, natural pillars of our lives. It is hard, in this context, not to question whether their role in Western culture is not being **exaggerated, as well as** whether our emotions and feelings are **well managed**. In other words, there is still very little systemic attention paid to dealing with emotions and feelings given how big a role they play in economics and politics, in individual lives as well as culture.

According to best-selling historian Noah Harari, no culture in history has given so much emphasis on **feelings** as the current culture of the West. Feelings are the backbone of modernity's new secular religion that, according to Harari, has saved the social order against the chaos of capitalism and modern science. **Humanism**, as he calls it, postulates that humans must find the meaning of their life and of the broader world within their **interior experience**: ethical knowledge = subjective experience + subjective sensitivity.

Modern industries sell novel experiences. Some emotions are required for the marketing of almost anything today, and political marketing is no exception. While responding to the feelings that have accumulated in the population is an important job for politicians, both emotions and feelings are easy to abuse in politics in general, and in populist politics in particular.

This swing from the rational to the emotional (rather than the irrational), which on the one hand is a healthy reaction to the technocratic rationalism of the past few decades, seems on the other hand to be a factor in the rise of the **post-truth society**. It is not just that the amount of information people need to process is growing faster than our capacity to do so

effectively, but also that we are confronted with less and less external (objective) guidance on how to organize this information, how to set priorities, and how to differentiate the more important things from those that are less important.

The **postmodern** trend to relativize – or even deconstruct – many “objective” truths in defense of the “subjective” may have gone too far. While contributing to the emancipation of groups formerly oppressed, at the same time the ensuing rampant individualism undermines the established social orders. Relativism and individualism not only tend to throw many people into uncertainty [Giddens, 1991] and to feed both individual and collective forms of identity politics [Fukuyama, 2018], but where they overshoot and turn into nihilism and narcissism as major components of contemporary culture in the West, then such cultural traits undermine the legitimacy of the healthy hierarchies crucial to democratic leadership.

At the same time, it is surprising how little attention in this culture of feelings is still paid to **emotional management** by our social institutions. Major psychologists such as Daniel Goleman repeatedly call for more focus on our minds: on open awareness, mindfulness or empathy. In his book on the importance of focus in this era of smartphones, he offers many positive examples, including meditative exercises in schools [Goleman, 2014]. Despite a massive outbreak of literature and the service market for personal development, emotional intelligence and mental wellbeing are still rather stalling on the margins of both the educational and health systems.

Age of Insecurity

After three decades of relatively high existential security, Western societies are once again undergoing more turbulent times. While **physical security** remains high (although terrorism and especially immigration have been changing the picture for some parts of society), economic security – as described above – has been decreasing for most parts of societies as a backdrop to these major cultural changes.

Since the 1970s, surveys in the United States and other countries have revealed a split between materialists, who stress the need for economic and physical security, and “**postmaterialists**” who take that security for granted, are more open, and emphasize less-tangible values. [Inglehart, 2018]

While postmaterialism was originally seeded with the younger generation, it has gradually spread throughout Western societies. With existential security declining, the polarizing tension between materialists and post-materialists is back. The balance has been changing between those who still **feel secure** or can manage the multiple insecurities (and keep supporting more liberal political streams) and those who do not feel secure or no longer can manage insecurity (and who increasingly go conservative or even call for politicians to start imposing order – for more authoritarianism).

As Inglehart confirms, this “feeling of security” **split** in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections had more influence on voting patterns than other standard demographic traits such as social class. The pattern was substantially stronger in these elections than in the 2012 elections, and Donald Trump won.

Inglehart (2018) further states that economic pressures tend to exacerbate **psychocultural pressures** toward authoritarianism. Denmark’s anti-Muslim party only won 14 % of the vote at the height of the international Muslim backlash against a Danish cartoon depicting the Prophet Muhammad in 2006. In the 2015 election, however, when Denmark was hit by the global economic (as well as the European migration) crisis, the party’s score was already up to 21 %, making it the second-largest party in a country that has long been liberal and open.

In the meantime, this possibility to appeal to insecure voters by **combining economic, cultural and physical fears** – indeed what used to be considered far-left and far-right agendas – has been well understood by other populist streams. The French *Front National* (now *Rassemblement National*) under Marine Le Pen has consciously expanded to target the issues of workers dominated by economic insecurities. A similar move to soften their xenophobic messages and strengthen their social rhetoric was also done by the ÖVP in Austria after Jörg Haider left.

Combining these different fear (i.e., leveraged insecurity) agendas allows populist (and in particular, extremist) parties to go more mainstream. Such developments tend to strengthen not just calls for **authoritarian** measures, but also the **conservative forces** opposing liberal political parties. What is even more alarming is that this provides more ground for conservative, populist, authoritarian factions within mainstream parties.

Mental Health

Mental security – or more broadly mental health – can be described as a state of reasonable comprehension of the world, control over one’s own life, and clarity about its meaning [Antonovsky, 1979]. There are a few important aspects to this concept that are relevant to our debate about insecurity and emotions: growing complexity, the fast tempo of life, and an insatiable quest for happiness.

Complexity used to be a feature of large systems. Today, complexity affects the **everyday life of individuals**. Most of its increase results from the rise of technology, especially information technology, over the past few decades. However, social complexity also increases with growing populations and their increased education, mobility, and wealth, as well cultural changes and increased empowerment, as pointed out above. [Sargut and McGrath, 2011; Harari 2017]

Giddens [1991] speaks rather of **uncertainty**, but has in mind a similar challenge posed by (late) modernity. Identity today is no longer a given, but a life-long task of construction. This constant struggle for meaning in one’s life (constructing a self-identity) takes a lot of time and effort and produces uncertainty. As we have already observed above, the other pole of this “certainty” scale is authority.

Modernity not only inspired people to want more, but also dismantled the traditional authorities that had previously curbed such greed. “With each passing year our tolerance for unpleasant sensations decreases and our craving for **pleasant sensations** increases.” [Harari, 2017, p. 49]

However, this **right to happiness** is very problematic, as it opens the way to a number of sociopathologies. This right is not just turning into the problematic consumerism that is steering the unsustainability of our planetary development, but it is also breeding an individualism that fragments society and undermines the social order. [Fukuyama, 2018] Psychologically, it tends to morph into narcissism, with its resulting anxieties and hypersensitivity. [Wilber, 2016]

As most psychologists suggest, to attain real happiness we need to **slow down** the pursuit of pleasant sensations, not accelerate it. More opportunities for entertainment and pleasures make us live faster and work more. Faster accumulation of knowledge leads to faster social changes – and greater cultural upheavals.

More recent research has confirmed that the result of the Brexit referendum, for example, reflected feelings about national identity **and reactions to change** more broadly, not just the grievances of “the left behind.” [Galasso et al., 2017, pp. 17–18]

The **fast tempo** of both our personal lives and these cultural changes (reflecting rapid technological, economic and social progress) over the past few decades in the Centrifugal Society has thus turned into a specific factor behind the populist backlash as well.

Crisis of Recognition

Social esteem is important to individuals because it is closely linked to the self-esteem on which their mental and physical health depends. [Gidron and Hall, 2018] However, this is a subjective category. While social class is determined by means of objective data about wealth, income or education, **subjective social status** is the level of esteem, recognition or respect that people believe is accorded to them within the social order, determined both by their material situation and their cultural (symbolic) beliefs.

National identity is an important source of status. It reinforces the group status of those who feel left behind. However, “threats to a person’s social status evoke feelings of **hostility to outgroups**, especially if the latter can be associated with the status threat.” [Gidron and Hall, 2017, p. 8] These “outgroups” include immigrants and Muslims in particular (who are perceived much more as a security and general cultural threat rather than just a religious one), but also Roma (in Eastern Europe) and other ethnic minorities.

More specifically, research shows that white working men (typically from the lower middle class) in the West base their sense of dignity on drawing sharp **social boundaries** between themselves and ethnic minorities such as North African migrants in France, African-Americans in the United States and Roma in Eastern Europe. Last but not least, in this context most men (not only white men) in general feel threatened by **gender equality**.

People with subjectively low social standing vote for extremist, populist parties both for **instrumental** reasons (punishing incumbents or hoping for improvement from a new Government) and **affective** ones (defense or revenge against outgroups).

One very important observation from the research on social status that has already been echoed above is the **expansion of marginalized groups**, which no longer contain just the lowest classes. “While people at the very bottom of the social hierarchy may feel such status anxiety, those most prone to it are likely to be people a few rungs up that hierarchy, namely those whose social status is low enough to generate concern but who still have a significant measure of status to defend.” [Gidron and Hall, 2017, p. 13]

This all is happening despite the solid economic growth of the West during the very same period. While we have seen how unequal the distribution of economic benefits can be, it is quite likely that some of the negative psychological and cultural externalities are also troubling those who have economically benefited (see Figure 1). In fact, it raises the question whether the populist backlash is not happening partly **because of economic growth**, whether such economic growth over the past few decades has been a way to mask not just social inequalities and environmental destruction, but also deeper psychocultural problems of civilization, and thus whether the debate about a new economic model, which is regularly revived at Davos and elsewhere, should also include the goal of personal, cultural development as well as sustainable development, i.e., reflecting both the exterior and interior domains of human life.

The Complicity of Progressive Policy NGOs

In addition to economic challenges and social neglect, psychological deprivation and cultural alienation can thus explain another large part of the populist backlash. More importantly,

these “feeling” factors not only show that what has become a phenomenon for all of Western civilization is not irrational, but that it also concerns even the upper middle or upper classes (see Figure 1). Can all of this also explain why Progressive Policy NGOs are being attacked more often and with increasing aggressiveness?

On the material-symbolic divide, NGOs certainly must reflect more on the psychological, cultural parts of the caused for the populist backlash. Since the very onset of neoliberal globalization there has been strong criticism of it and resistance to it by civil society – the so-called **anti-globalization movement**. Often aligning themselves with the Progressive Left, the NGOs can hardly be accused of not challenging economic and social injustice.

The NGOs have also been on the frontline of the struggle to defend the most **socially neglected** or despised groups, such as single mothers, the elderly, homeless people, drug addicts, former prisoners or people under the burden of collections proceedings.

Yet there has been very little reflection on the side of Progressive Policy NGOs about psychological deprivation (stress, frustration, isolation, anxieties, etc.) and above all about the emerging **cultural conflict**, the extent of such phenomena (going far beyond the lower classes) and how powerful such phenomena are (driving people to support not just alternative, but extremist, anti-democratic streams).

What all populist streams have in common is the idea that a society is divided, indeed polarized, into two homogenous, antagonistic groups: the **pure people vs. the corrupt, rogue, greedy, rotten, etc., elite**. “The people” must fight against “the establishment”. As Bakker, Rooduin and Schumacher (2016) detail, this can be a political, economic, legal, media or cultural elite, which apart, from academics and writers, also includes the prominent NGOs.

As the LSE professor Michael Cox (2017) aptly sums up, populism today reflects a deep suspicion of:

- The establishment/elites
- Foreigners/internationalization, either as globalization or EU integration (or both)
- Mainstream media, intellectuals and freelance professions
- Metropolitan areas and big cities,

The Progressive Policy NGOs tend to fall under all of these categories. They are based in capitals or large cities so they can be in contact with the political establishment (and often with other elites as well). Most of our organizations consist of well-educated intellectuals and other professionals with foreign experience and EU/international funding. We tend to have metropolitan lifestyles, jargon and cultural outlooks, often following and contributing to similarly-oriented media.

The Progressive Policy NGOs are seen as peddling the changes that disrupt the social order. As a group they tend to be rather open and footloose, to support the EU integration and internationalization, multiculturalism, minority rights, gender equality and environmental responsibility that **increasingly irritate** the bulk of the populist and the extremist parties’ voters.

It is, therefore, no surprise that the New Marginalized consider us NGOs a part of the establishment as well, no matter how much we claim to challenge the establishment.

Some of the arguments made about NGOs (such as saving taxpayers’ money by cutting public funding for NGOs or restrictively defining public benefit status for NGOs) can be rather partial or artificial and are meant to provide additional ammunition and support for the main, often implicit reason behind them: **cultural hostility** against NGOs actively promoting a different worldview (or representing the political opposition).

Walk in the Shoes of Resentment

This is a glimpse into how these voters tend to think or feel:

The blind belief in the benefits of ethnic, racial and religious plurality and in the rights of all people to free movement (or even their rights to support from our governments) is leading to unmanageable immigration flows that threaten our security, jobs and values (or even to the mistaken idea that we can resolve our demographic problem by importing foreigners rather than reviving the traditional multiparous family). Furthermore, women's rights and gay rights are undermining our families and the male identity.

We in the lower middle classes contribute much more to society, but we receive much less support from the government than do members of marginalized groups (to say nothing of foreign nationals) who have not contributed into the social security system but who are unfairly entitled to receive welfare. The NGOs complicate our government services, our infrastructure and our schools in the name of inclusion. Their abstract claims for climate justice or the sake of other environmental issues takes our jobs away, prevents us from using our land, or pushes us to break our habits such as eating meat (which is itself against nature!).

Those NGOs mingle with the despised establishment politicians, the mainstream media and the intellectuals, speaking their same language. Just like those elites, the NGOs are being conceited and looking down on us. Last but not least, they get paid for all this disruptive work with public – or foreign – money, although it yields little positive impact for us. This makes the NGOs corrupt in both the cultural and the economic sense.

As opposed to the conservative streams, the populist, extremist politicians have additional – and more immediate – motivations that they hide behind such argumentation. Progressive NGOs are firm supporters of pluralist democracy, and therefore are part of the political opposition to any authoritarian forces. They publically oppose (and even mobilize populations against) moves to concentrate power or to limit the rule of law or basic constitutional freedoms. Any steps and arguments that **discredit** (these or any other) **NGOs** – along with the mainstream media, artists or foreign critics – help the populists to consolidate their power.

There is both economic and symbolic work to be done. While **redistribution** (a key factor in the vote for the populist left) has become a priority agenda for many Progressive Policy NGOs (such as Oxfam), **recognition** for large groups of people feeling left behind (a key factor in the vote for the populist right) remains little understood, to say nothing of being turned into the active campaigning or advocacy work of NGOs. For instance, an active policy of re-employment might be more important for such people than are unemployment benefits.

We will return to how progressive NGOs might respond to this challenge in the last chapter. The next chapter offers a broader conceptual framework that actually allows us to put all these various developments and observations under one roof and to **reconstitute the big picture**.

IV. Towards the Integral – Reframing the Bigger Picture

As was shown above, the causes of the populist backlash across various classes and Western countries have mutually-reinforcing feelings in common, ranging from a sense of economic unfairness and social neglect to stress, technological anxiety and cultural alienation. Of particular importance to culture clashes are feelings of existential insecurity and lack of recognition driven by precarious, disappearing jobs and by excessive demands for changes to the skills and norms of behavior present among the lower middle and middle classes: the New Marginalized.

Therefore, we need to view our polarized, Centrifugal Societies from a more comprehensive perspective that can integrate all these various disciplines and these different factors of populist backlash. We need to find a more historical perspective that allows us to recognize a long-term pattern of cultural evolution into which this conflict of world views can be placed. In other words, a larger cultural framework would help us see the current populist wave as an opportunity **to correct the systemic excesses** of the Centrifugal Civilization and revamp it for healthier economic, social, psychological and cultural developments.

The Integral Theory of the social scientist and philosopher Ken Wilber (2000, 2006) and the Spiral Dynamics Integral of the systemic thinkers Don Beck and Christopher Cowan (1996) are just such synthetic evolutionary theories. They are based on works by Clare Graves (spiral dynamics and values); the psychologists Jean Piaget (theory of cognitive development), Jane Loevinger (stages of ego development) and Robert Kegan (orders of consciousness); the linguist Jean Gebser (structures of human consciousness); the theologian James Fowler (stages of faith); Abraham Maslow (hierarchy of needs); and the Indian philosopher Sri Aurobindo (spiritual evolution).

It is interesting to note that the views of many key authors (such as those mentioned above) tend to converge with these Integral approaches, so that this typology serves as a good illustration of an evolving, more general understanding in current research. In fact, Integral theory has also been recognized by Al Gore and Bill Clinton. However, the big question is whether it is actually not being used by Donald Trump and other populists now. As we will see below, the way they are able to leverage the spiral dynamic is to be envied by other politicians.

While both of these models are very sophisticated, representing a synthesis of various evolutionary theories, from biology to psychology to culture, the key idea they share is rather simple.

As shown in Figure 3, the evolution of all forms of human existence proceeds through different steps. When responding to the challenges of surviving and living together, all individuals and cultures need to start at level 1 and evolve different forms of consciousness and organizing structures from simple mental/social models **to more complex forms**.

Transcend and Include

Each of the **development stages** (called a “meme” and characterized by a different color in the original theory) can be described by its dominant values and displays similar patterns across

different types of evolution (cognitive, aesthetic, spiritual, etc.). We can divide this evolution into three, five, or more stages (Beck and Wilber use nine stages, clustered in three tiers), but the logic remains the same. As humans we evolve from egocentric to ethnocentric to world-centric mindsets (worldviews/organizing structures/value systems), gradually broadening the number of views that we can perceive and incorporate into our actions.

While each human or culture can “freeze” at any stage, the proportion of people and cultures capable of higher complexity has been proved to have been steadily growing since the 1970’s (also known as the **Flynn effect**). [Brink, 2012] Each stage fulfills certain functions and needs, helping individuals or cultures to resolve certain problems within a particular context at a given time (to survive, obey, win, set rules, prosper, gain freedom, learn, connect, etc.).

The crucial rule of evolution is that each **higher stage always includes the lower stages** of evolution. Hence it is a spiral. The lower stages do not disappear but continue to play an important part in the life of the individual or culture – they are just no longer the center of gravity (or the leading edge). Similarly, just because we have enough food does not mean we will stop eating. However, we will be able to shift our attention and to spend more time creating, helping or learning. Thus, no stage can be skipped. For instance, the worldcentric mindset includes and understands both ethnocentric and egocentric behavior, but itself cannot be fully understood by those still at the egocentric and ethnocentric stages.

In this sense, while each stage is true (but partial), every higher stage in the evolution is even more true. It is, however, important to stress that spiral dynamics is not a moral judgment, but a developmental model. Rather than types of people/cultures, the stages are types *interior* to people/cultures. This means the different color qualities in the model are neither good or bad *per se*. Each color can be useful in a different situation. Each stage also has its **healthy and its pathological expressions**.

Problems arise when one stage wants to **dominate at the expense of the other stages**. The stage desiring dominance highlights the weaknesses and denies the strengths of other stages while also ignoring its own pathological forms. The other stages are then denied their proper place in life (and usually rebel against the oppressor). It is only in this sense that those perspectives that successfully include and integrate increasingly more perspectives can be considered “better” than those that encompass less of reality. This approach opens up room both for respect towards less complex views as well as for a certain hierarchy (order) to provide (leaders) with a sense of direction.

Wilber calls these **growth (actualization) hierarchies** typical of more Integral cultures (second tier) as opposed to the domination (oppressive) hierarchies typical of the first tier. This especially applies to ethnocentric or egocentric cultures, but even the highest, most complex, worldcentric cultural stage so far developed – the postmodern Green – is no stranger to oppressive behavior. Thus, the primary challenge of the Green, which is currently leading cultural evolution, is to evolve from oppressing (deploring, ignoring, condescending) all of the lower stages to the phase of integrating them.

According to Wilber’s calculations, once 10 to 15% of individuals in a given population achieve a higher stage, it becomes the “**leading edge**” for the whole culture. That does not mean every person becomes instantly more conscientious (or that everyone agrees with the new worldview), but that a space has opened in that society for the further evolution of common norms.

As long as the leading stage provides for this overall growth, evolution moves the worldviews of both individuals and cultures at all stages. Once the actions inspired by the leading worldview fail to help the other worldview stages grow, then the cultural group (the class or tribe, if you will) that promotes the leading worldview needs to either heal or be replaced.

Wilber's theory shows that such a **clog** in the leading edge of evolution not only affects the top, but also all the stages below. That is where we seem to be today.

Riding down the Spiral

The **current conflict** behind the populist backlash can thus be interpreted as raging between those who espouse progressive, liberal ideas of human rights, equality, multiculturalism and environmental responsibility (the Green Stage) and those who have different priority values (worldviews). The resistance to "Green" culture is so strong precisely because it is not just the closest lower level of cultural development that is fighting it (in this model, Orange), but also the other stages further down the spiral that are fighting it (Red, Blue and Purple).

Egocentric Red (PowerGods) seeks power and control. Their world is a battleground. This stage maintains social order through fear and punishment. The only rules that matter are the rules of the winners. Examples include Achilles, Islamic State or most of the "Game of Thrones" characters.

Blue (TruthForce) is traditional and ethnocentric. Its social order is based on hierarchy with rigid rules and absolute loyalty in service to one's community. Patriotism and nationalism, heroes and sinners are the Blue language. This is the world of the armed forces, the aristocracy, the Catholic Church and social conservatives.

Orange (StriveDrive) is the first worldcentric stage. The social order is dominated by an effective market where free, equal and rational individuals compete based on their merits. Scientific and technological progress is skeptical of the state and any other external authorities. Materialism defies morality. Examples can be found on Wall Street, among personal growth gurus or the singer Madonna.

Postmodern Green (HumanBond) is a much more sensible worldcentric stage poised to challenge any kind of oppression. The Green social order is a responsible, post-material, global community embracing the Earth's ecosystem, world cultures and marginalized groups. It is a culture of the New Age, John Lennon or hipsters.

We could hardly find a more telling embodiment of an **anti-Green** agenda than Donald Trump, but he is also a very skillful rider of the Orange, Blue and Red waves. He presents himself as a successful businessman who understands the world, wins competitions and protects the free market from global "over-regulation" such as the Paris Agreement on climate change. He plays the nationalist and racial cards, offering Blue voters a border wall with Mexico and a trade war with China. Red is probably his strongest card – it's the sexist, nativist, egocentric display of power and language that respects no rules and channels anger and resentment of all sorts.

If we add the appeals here and there to Purple (KinSpirits) rituals and to folklore as well as the talk about fighting and survival that turns on the Beige (SurvivalSense) stage instincts, it is clear that Donald Trump (and a number of other populist leaders) can integrate – **symbolically or literally** – pretty much the whole spiral of worldviews/values below the Green Stage, much better than any Green Stage leaders are. One would almost conclude that if Mr. Trump could only add the Green Stage, he would make for a perfect Integral leader.

It should come as no surprise, however, that at the same time many others are also a perfect example of the **opposite extreme**, i.e., the Green Stage's pathologies and excesses: pragmatic relativism, nihilism, and obnoxious narcissism benefiting the rise of the post-truth society on a daily basis. This is a theme we will tackle later.

Some of the big polarizing protest votes, such as the Brexit referendum or the recent French presidential elections have not been so straightforward, and the leading populists have not been

Figure 3 – The Stages of the Spiral Dynamics Integral

		Spiral Dynamics colors	Estimated % of world population
INDIGO POST INTEGRAL	Realizes Oneness. Exhibits wisdom, joy & love. Seen in saints and sages throughout history. Theoretical and aspirational.	CORAL	
TURQUOISE Holistic (Integral II)	Sees the World as alive and evolving. Holistic & kosmo-centric. Lives from both individual self and trans-personal Self. Emerging now.	TURQUOISE GlobalView	0.1
TEAL Integrative (Integral I)	Sees natural hierarchy and systems of systems. Holds multiple perspectives. Flexible, creative and effective. Online 50 years.	YELLOW FlexFlow	1–3
GREEN POST MODERN	Values pluralism & equality. Relativistic & sensitive. Civil rights & environmentalism. World centric. Online 150 years.	GREEN HumanBond	5–10
ORANGE MODERN	Values rationality & science. Individualism & democracy. Capitalism & materialism. Risk-taking & self reliance. Online 300 years.	ORANGE StriveDrive	25–30
AMBER TRADITIONAL	Ethno- or nation-centric. Values rules, roles & discipline. Faith in a transcendent God or Order. Socially conservative. Online 5,000 years.	BLUE TruthForce	35–40
RED WARRIOR	Ego-centric, vigilant & aggressive. Impulsive and ruthless. Courageous, determined and powerful. Online 15,000 years.	RED PowerGods	15–20
MAGENTA TRIBAL	Sees the world as enchanted. Values ritual & deep community. Individual subordinate to group. Online 50,000 years.	PURPLE KinSpirits	5–10
INFRARED ARCHAIC	Dawning self-awareness. Survives through instinct, intuition and bonding with others. Online 250,000 years.	BEIGE SurvivalSense	0.1

Sources: 1) Wilber, Ken, *A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science and Spirituality*, Shambhala Publication, 2000, 2) Beck, Don E. and Cowan, Christopher C., *Spiral Dynamics: Mastering Values, Leadership, and Change*, 2005, Wiley/Blackwell, 3) summary by: The Daily Evolver, <https://www.dailyevolver.com/theory/>

so emblematic of the Green worldview’s problems. However, these **cleavages**, as well as the efforts to integrate anti-Green streams, appear to run along very similar thematic lines and to reflect the particular national configurations of one and the same cultural conflict within Western civilization.

Towards Integral Leadership

Looking into history, we see that for the next stage of leadership to take hold of politics in the West what has always been needed was some basic presence of the corresponding values and mindset in the population. So unless and until a critical amount of people (estimated as an additional approximately 5% of the population in Western democracies) can evolve their consciousness into the Integral Stage it is hard to see how the rest of the society can be persuaded to entrust them with governance, or how countless instances of frictions among a number of the major stages/worldviews can be tamed.

The key task here for those aspiring to grow into Integral is that of **transcending**. This means embracing the positive Orange, Blue, Red, Purple and Beige color values (analogous to embracing the various material and symbolic concerns and values of the voters of conservative, populist and extremist parties across the different classes) in an inclusive, non-patronizing manner, including those who disagree with being so embraced. Needless to say, this must be done without losing one's grounding in the progressive liberal values of the Green.

Clearly this is not paving the road to some kind of ultimate Heaven where everybody loves everyone else (although tolerance, compassion and loving kindness are the ultimate values that inspire the Integral Stage), or where we all become sages and philosophers and history stops. The **conflicts** between different worldviews – even among Integral (second tier) worldviews – are **here to stay**, just like multiculturalism did not eliminate nationalism, nationalism did not eliminate tribalism, and tribalism did not eliminate mysticism. Rather, the Integral approach offers a more effective management of these natural differences. Of course, the Integral Stage, once it achieves its full swing, is bound to be wracked with its own pathologies waiting to be overcome – or rather subsumed – by the next stage in civilizational development.

The Integral approach thus suggests that the next stage for civilizational evolution should actually not be about adding some more or some new values to fight for. Our civilization is already pluralistic (multicultural, postmodern ..) enough. Rather, the task is to **reconcile all the values** that are now fighting each other, i.e., to substantially tone down this conflict, and create a space where their healthy, useful expressions can be present, recognized and integrated, where they can grow. However, this requires the Green leading edge to overcome its own internal conflicts and excesses ("pathologies", in Giddens' terms), such as its tendencies to relativism, nihilism and narcissism.

Let's now try to look at the **pathologies** – the deficiencies and excesses – of the cultural elite (or of elite culture) from this perspective.

Nihilism and Narcissism

The Green leading edge tends to consist of the progressive Left (in the Anglo-Saxon or Scandinavian terminology), the Green parties, and much of social democracy or the liberal center-right parties in continental political systems. Ken Wilber (2016) identifies its two major problems as an "aperspectival madness" and a "performative contradiction" that both result in the current **post-truth society**.

The term "aperspectival madness" stands for a critique of deconstructive, postmodern relativism as tending to turn into nihilism and narcissism. In the noble efforts to honor universal human rights and to empower those left behind, postmodern relativism makes equal not just all human lives, but also all human opinions and feelings: If my or my groups' subjective views and appetites are as important as anyone else's, then why should I obey any common rules or respect any objective standards?

There is an important difference between the right to choose one's own values and the disappearance of commonly held, universal values. When there are no universal norms, then there is only normative nihilism to direct people. In this light, post-truth and **unbridled consumerism** are just two faces of the same cultural coin – both are unhealthy expressions of a spreading narcissism. This is also a major theme of Anthony Giddens (1996), who claims that narcissistic, fundamentalist personalities are just two faces of one and the same social system.

This is shown, for instance, by a tendency to validate the claims by subgroups of various identities that they need to protect their right to express their identity in a particular way towards others – such as, for example, by achieving the identification of transgender toilets. Such affirmative actions may protect plurality, but they also lead to the promotion of marginalized groups' claims over those of similarly (dis)qualified others.

The **performative contradiction** points to an even more serious reason for distrust towards the Green Stage: It is doing exactly what it says the others should not do. While postmodernism suggests that all views are contextual, its own view is held up as an absolute, universal truth for all people at all times (anybody disagreeing with the Green Stage is at best a "deplorable"). This elevates Green Postmodernism above all the other worldviews that disagree with postmodernism, although theoretically they should all be equal. It is no wonder the Green worldview raises so much anger and resentment.

This performative contradiction adds to the many more contradictions the establishment has been trying to cover up that have undermined the popular trust – the massive bail-out of the financial actors most complicit in the global economic crises in the face of huge public debts and cuts to public budgets, the Iraq war deception, etc.

Last but not least, the Green edge overdoes **political correctness**. It is of course important to keep to certain rules of debate in the public space, such as avoiding personal attacks or profanities. However, this becomes counterproductive when it prevents any differentiation among good or bad, or pointing out dilemmas, or correcting mistakes, or speaking to lower stage mindsets, or even to ruling out humor. As a leading US comedian, Jerry Seinfeld, put it: "US college campuses are losing their sense of humor."

When public debate degenerates into discriminating against any mainstream view that might potentially offend minorities, when it supports hypersensitivity, then it effectively **blocks collective processes** and undermines the capacity for collective reflection. This debate is more dramatic in the US than in Europe, because Europe seems more lukewarm on both sides (less sensitive about protecting the feelings of minority groups as well as less sensitive about the interpretation of free speech). Moreover, majoritarian political systems are more prone to polarization than are proportional ones. However, the core point is similar.

V. NGOs Regaining the Progressive Lead

The more integral mindset and culture that many bright minds (implicitly or explicitly) are suggesting is what we need to recover the weakening centers of our societies. This approach attempts to include various worldviews and looks for common denominators (“transcends”). It charts a middle way between unbridled individualism and oppressive collectivism, between chaotic relativism and authoritarian fundamentalism.

Leaders at the Integral Stage develop **healthy hierarchies** supporting each evolutionary stage in its positive role and its further growth, but reflect comprehensively on how each worldview can serve the whole civilization. Of course, it would be great to already have such political leaders in place. A number of them, such as Merkel, Trudeau or Macron seem to display Integral qualities. However, the more other leaders in society can perceive, include and balance different mindsets and cultures in everyday life, the easier it will be to achieve such leadership in politics.

While this is difficult to prove beyond a doubt, Wilber estimates that the current composition of the U.S. population (and Europe is likely to be similar) is 60% people at an ethnocentric or lower stage, 25% at the Green Stage and **5%** already at the Integral Stage. That would mean a good deal of the current leaders in different sectors belong to the Integral Stage or are capable of moving there rather quickly. The NGOs and their leaders are no different.

In this light, the problem is not that most publicly, politically-active NGOs are wrong, misguided, or have done bad things. There is every reason to keep defending human dignity, solidarity, sustainability, civil rights and various minorities around the world even today. In fact, the populist wave threatens to compromise what has been achieved and to shrink the space for civil society well beyond just the Progressive Policy NGOs.

There is a clear need for a coordinated, defensive action across the civil society sector. Many such activities are underway around the world. While a description of the main streams of these actions is beyond the remits of this paper, let alone a decent analysis of them, many of the efforts evolve around building stronger networks, not just thematic ones, but also functional ones – such as coordinated mobilization, communication, advocacy or data analysis, including networks of networks. Without some mid- to longer term goals, however, it is difficult to build an effective communication or advocacy strategy.

The objective of this paper, therefore, was rather to look at the possibilities for a proactive, long-term agenda (vision) based on an analysis of the broader trends in Western civilization. From this bird’s eye view perspective, the problem rather lies in Progressive NGOs being too focused on a small part of society (the bottom 10%) and being **too partial** in terms of the relevant agendas – and even the most forward-looking NGOs are not really providing a clear lead for stabilizing Centrifugal Society now.

On the other hand, as Progressive NGOs, we, too, have been pushing the rights of various groups too far without noticing that it actually decreases the self-esteem of other groups. We, too, have overlooked the creation of the New Marginalized class (the bottom 60%). We, too,

have been complicit in increasing mental insecurity by pressing for fast changes to the social order. We, too, have often been contributing to dividing and fragmenting society, rather than to fostering the center.

General Reactions to Populist Attacks

As was shown above, the Progressive Policy NGOs have thus been viewed by many as complicit in this cultural overhaul and have become a target of the populist wave. The reaction of NGOs to populism and extremism has been as diverse as the sector itself. The Progressive Policy NGOs, however, have tended to come up with similar conclusions:

- defend our values, oppose illiberal tendencies
- debunk the myths with more facts
- explain our “asks” in different language
- develop new counter-narratives

While some of these do make good sense in both the short and the long term, others seem to rather miss the key messages of the populist wave or can even be counterproductive. The principle problem I see is with the efforts to adjust the format and language of NGO work rather than to think through the **ultimate goals** and to **address the deeper causes** of their decreased legitimacy.

In general, there is a reflection that something is happening in Western societies and that Progressive Policy NGOs need to react to it and adjust themselves. A lot of attention is focused on the supply side of populist, extremist politics – on visible power and how to confront it. Much less attention is paid to the **invisible power** and the **demand side**. Obviously, the strategies in countries where populists already control much of politics are bound to be different than strategies in those countries where they are still just one of a number of political streams.

In this paper the focus has been more on the possible **long-term agenda** to counter the populist wave – a cultural transformation of leaders to a higher stage of mental development capable of managing higher complexity. This is more suitable to less critical democratic conditions where a basic space for civil society is still open.

Yet defending the space for civil society while not further polarizing the voters of populist, extremist parties implies walking on quite thin ice under any circumstances. What may be particularly difficult is combining a **critique** of the power-mongering authoritarians with the expression of understanding **and empathy** for their voters.

Since the main idea of this Integral Stage is to **reconcile** through “including and transcending”, the basic assumption is to **admit the limitations** to one’s own truth and the validity of the **opponents’ truth**. This “true but partial” approach is how a deeper common denominator can be found in order to synthesize different worldviews. Both are likely to be painful. While I am drawing on my own personal experience with various platforms of Progressive Policy NGOs in the Czech Republic, the following two and half pages are mainly a polemic with the proposals (although not with the excellent analysis) of the Oxfam backgrounder on the implications of populism for development NGOs. [Galasso et al., 2017]

Regaining Trust

More awareness raising and campaigning about agendas that are sensitive for populist voters (such as migration or minority rights) may upset them even more. Neither well-researched evidence, nor different language is likely to persuade people with different educations and cultural outlooks or those at different stages of consciousness evolution. They will simply

not trust these NGOs in the first place because of **the values** they embody. Until the (lower) middle classes can see tangible benefits from such campaigns for their own group (not just for the usual marginalized groups) they might consider them to be just more of the same old system they do not like.

Even if such a proposition is accepted by the NGOs, stepping down their pressure and reducing the visibility of some of their most **controversial claims** and policy “asks” may not go down well with well-profiled Progressive Policy NGOs.

I find even more problematic – in fact, very short-sighted – the idea of Progressive Policy NGOs **aligning with the extremist Left** to balance the rise of the extremist Right, which on average is indeed more authoritarian and anti-progressive. [Galasso et al., 2017] This would further weaken the center of our societies. It is important to keep in mind that the far ends of both the extremist Left and the extremist Right tend to connect. This would also declare political war on those voters whom we rather need to better understand and involve in society.

A number of ideas being floated in the NGO discussion are pointing in the right direction. The most common reflection usually relates to the dry, abstract, technical **language** that Progressive Policy NGOs often use. Bringing in more positive **emotions** (not just more facts) or adjusting vocabulary and messages to the level of complexity that less-educated people can take would definitely help NGOs to communicate across other groups of voters.

The Oxfam reflections even suggest that “[i]n addition to developing counter-narratives underpinned by robust data and evidence, NGOs should also explore the parallel use of **non-adversarial strategies** that are propositional and embody positive visions, like those represented in work on alternative economic paradigms.” [Galasso et al., 2017, pp. 54] However, a changed language can only have impact if it is part of a changed approach.

Also, more focus on domestic or even **new domestic programs** would certainly provide a greater opportunity to test innovative ways of working with these more conservative groups or the New Marginalized: gathering evidence and campaigning in support of issues of common interest that the New Marginalized would understand as their own cause, allowing them to speak to their own pride and role in society.

Unfairness vs. Inequality

Among other things, this is a chance to provide **different content to** contentious NGOs **concepts**, such as that of inequality.

The growing gap between the rich and the rest of the society is being instrumentalized by left-wing populists, while the diminishing gap between the poor and the lower and middle classes is targeted by right-wing populists.

As the psychological research mentioned above by Rodrik [2018] suggests, it is unfairness, rather than inequality, that angers populist voters. In other words, it is ok for most people if those who deserve more – or need more – than others actually get more, but not excessively more.

Depending on the given national socio-economic circumstances, more focus may be needed on economic redistribution from the top down, or on a more fairly-designed safety net that does not discriminate against the lower and middle classes. It is a fine balance to strike that is not helped by “one-way” concepts.

In the situation of most of the European states with rising right-wing parties, a more equal material redistribution does not appear to be what the lower-skilled, lower income groups want the most. It may well be that what they want is more fairness, more ways to confirm their dignity – the symbolic recognition of their contribution to society – or the **addressing** of other **challenges they face**.

How is more tax justice, for instance, going to help dispel their fears of losing their jobs – precarious and low-paid as they may be – to automation or to cheap labor in the global South? How might more thorough research of the cross-cultural root causes of migration – “debunking the myths” – address why so many people are against immigration to begin with?

It is also very difficult to lead a dialogue about common denominators with (or to show respect for) people whose **concerns** (even if they are “just” feelings) are described by others as **“myths”**. Presenting more evidence in support of other marginalized groups also strengthens cognitive dissonance for members of the majority society – it shows the lower middle class that objectively they should not feel as bad as they subjectively do!

This is not as much about specific policies as it is about the overall balance of the political framework.

As I have suggested, by highlighting the New Marginalized class, the Progressive Policy NGOs might want to consider **broadening their definition** of poverty and marginalization, i.e., of those who qualify to be helped by the public, and emphasizing fairness rather than equality. The current narrow definitions are effectively targeting the very bottom of society but are just about missing the much larger groups of those only slightly above the bottom.

Dilemmas of Inclusion

Many of these people do not really wish to be “equal” in this way. They might want to close the gap between them and those who are richer, but not between them and those who are poorer. How should we respond to such a situation? Can we, as Progressive Policy NGOs, tolerate such an attitude and still want to see how to help these people, or is it **unacceptable to “our values”**, so we rather leave them be?

Such refusal might only confirm to these people that we think they are wrong (or unequal in another way). Should we not promote a rather different approach (or narrative): Claim that it is ok for them to have their values and that what we want does not oppose their values, but rather is an **addition to** their values and we need to try to respect and take account of ALL values?

Another risk is in doing two contradictory things at the same time: you cannot, on the one hand, further **divide** the society **and** want to **connect** it on the other! Looking for ways to culturally reconcile with these groups while defending our Progressive Policy NGOs values – “whether openly and aggressively or otherwise” [Galasso et al., 2017, pp. 52] can only work if propped up by a single, higher-level (mental and communication) framework.

Last but not least, the development NGO debate is almost not at all about the **aim of development**. Is the aim to promote marginalized groups or is it to move the whole society further up in the evolution of its consciousness and ability to manage complex reality?

This is a huge task for any society. Civil society can and should lend a hand, but cannot be solely responsible for cultural transformation. Publically, politically active NGOs may, however, be the right environment in which to start this much-needed (self-)reflection and to **test the new paths**.

Basic orientations for further debate and work

What kind of longer-term changes could this entail? Some are already underway, others less so. Based on the preceding analysis, Progressive Policy NGOs may consider change in the following major areas:

Language

A move from technocratic, administrative newspeak to more lively, engaging language, from abstract, complicated concepts to simpler messages accessible to people without higher education and outside the urban cultural context (the author critically admits that his own language in this text is not the best guidance). Facts and evidence presented in more graphic, emotional ways in order to balance the right and left hemispheres of the brain. Many CSOs, not just Progressive Policy NGOs, are already going this direction, especially in campaigns and communication (most notably on social media). Yet an impact on the most-alienated groups of society can be expected only if these people believe not just our words, but also believe in our goals and in the means we use to achieve them.

Formats

Another obvious move would be to put less emphasis on convincing (various target groups of) the public, including policy-makers, about our own truth and more emphasis on listening, on talking about our issues and responding to large groups with different cultural outlooks from our own. We need to learn to perceive and get a deeper understanding of diverging worldviews.

This would mean relaxing classical awareness raising, campaigning and lobbying in favor of outreach to the environments of the New Marginalized, as well as to the leaders in society, and to dialogue with the New Marginalized, with the view of facilitating a broader consensus on a topic and on shared values and interests. Development or migration NGOs' experiences of facilitating cooperation and partnership in culturally different environments might be particularly useful. Most importantly, this would help to build our own (as well as others') capacities for all of this. The one thing we definitely need to lobby for is a more Integral approach by political institutions to policy-making.

This is also a challenge for the methodology of education, which should be bringing more different, conflicting perspectives to any topic and allowing learners to identify with – and ideally, to emotionally experience – the legitimate values behind such perspectives, their deeper common grounds and the broader context.

Claims

This area concerns organizations with the specific Green-Stage policy goals typical of Progressive Policy NGOs. While the universal human rights and global responsibility agenda represents a landmark of civilizational progress, a number of the specific migration, gender, environmental, development and other policy "asks" may have gone too far for some groups in society. Where such claims tend to provide only a marginal benefit for a very narrow group at the discomfort or expense of many others (e.g., arranging transgender toilets or vast inflows of Islamic immigrants), their broader legitimacy plummets, generating substantial backlash against both the agenda and the NGO sector.

So we need to review the various policy "asks" that we advocate for, especially those we advocate for collectively in NGO platforms, and focus on those that tackle the crucial issues of universal rights and responsibilities that are directly relevant to those even beyond the most-marginalized groups. For the less-universal agendas, it is crucial not to target the groups most likely to be irritated by the tasks they involve. Concrete thematic proposals are beyond the possibilities of this think piece and cannot be done by one person, but a few moves

have already been suggested, such as a move from discussing equality to discussing fairness, or from a global scale to that of national and local governance.

Constituency

Building a stronger base of supporters among a broader range of citizen groups has already been recognized as an important response to this dilemma by Progressive Politics NGOs. While the greater involvement of citizens in public affairs is key for our democracies to survive, that building a stronger base should not be done with the primary aim of boosting NGOs' defense (or even their ability to go on the offense) in the cultural conflicts that are splitting societies further apart.

This is an opportunity to reflect on the size and the diversity of the voices an organization represents. Is it a closed, homogenous silo, or does it resonate across more than one worldview? How embedded is it in the rest of its own society as opposed to reflecting the ideas and interests of its donors, its partners or its own leaders? We need to try to break apart these silos and to reach out to new partners in sectors of society such as business, or community leaders in the countryside, both to get corrective feedback about our main deficiencies and excesses as well as to strengthen our roots.

Funding

The character of our constituency is also reflected in the structure of our resources. Stronger support from our own community or society usually results in a higher share of domestic, private resources flowing to us. Public and foreign/international funding plays a vital role in filling financial gaps, but runs the risk of focusing the organization on a narrow agenda and alienating it from the bulk of its domestic society. Broadening constituency should thus be accompanied by diversifying funding, an imperative if an NGO is to achieve greater legitimacy, stability and resilience.

Target groups

The mission of serving the public benefit is powerful, both in terms of an NGO's morality and effectiveness. Systemic efforts to help the most needy and fragile in the society (or even on the planet) have pulled whole civilizations a few stages up in our cultural evolution. NGOs have played a big part in that. The current political backlash in the West, however, shows that the leadership's focus on the bottom of has gradually bypassed and, along with other centrifugal trends, derailed the center, especially the lower center of our societies. If we want this cultural achievement of the 20th Century to be sustainable, we need to declare a new objective of helping the New Marginalized: moving from focusing on the bottom 10% to the bottom 60%.

Regardless of what the objective evidence may say, as long as large groups of society subjectively do not feel like not dealing with protecting the planet and its weak people, then we need to deal with those groups, too, paying them genuine, proportional material and symbolic attention. Apart from the mindful fighters against violence, oppression and discrimination (being mindful of the broader societal context) we also need organizations who will focus specifically on the frustrated (lower) middle classes, on people with low education and income, on senior citizens, on rural inhabitants, and also on men in particular, as they are undergoing a more severe identity crisis than are women.

This, I believe, is the key leadership challenge of our time, but leadership cannot be just a role for politicians. As we are talking about a cultural transformation here, our awareness raising, facilitation, campaigning and capacity building need to target economic, social and cultural leaders as well.

Agendas

The New Marginalized do not necessarily face deprivations and challenges that are entirely different from those of traditional marginalized groups. They face lack of social recognition, economic, social and psychological insecurity, and a lack of capacities to deal with fast changes in an increasingly complex environment. The accent is different in their case, though.

The support the New Marginalized seem to desire is less material (although fairer redistribution needs to stay high on the agenda) and more symbolic and psychological: respect for their lifestyle, dignity, esprit de corps, finding and retaining a strong identity both personal and collective, including new roles and meanings of life.

This brings in a range of issues that are already being discussed in society but that by and large are not being picked up by the Progressive Policy NGOs such as:

- How can we manage the huge transformation of the labor market towards precariousness, automation and AI, as well as other economic challenges people face on a regular basis?
- What are the pros and cons of an economy based more on interior human domains (self-development) rather than on external domains (material growth)?
- How can we reach out to the various groups of society at the lower stages: What are the most appropriate media and how can we acquire the appropriate language for each group?
- How can we address various forms of insecurity and lack of dignity?
- How can we reduce stress levels and improve emotional intelligence and mental health among the New Marginalized?
- How can we balance acquiring key competencies for a complex, dynamic world with decelerating changes in both our personal and social lives?

Goals

One of the big controversial questions (in fact, an assumption of this hypothesis) remains to what extent the support and capacity building for the New Marginalized would also help increase their respect for the dignity and different identities of others, including the most vulnerable, and their respect for democracy. Trust and respect is currently being progressively eroded to the point of the election of heavily reductionist, authoritarian rulers even in some democratic countries.

Clearly the strategies of Progressive Policy NGOs in countries like Hungary or Poland will necessarily differ from countries where populist and extremist forces are still in check. This new kind of building capacities and safe spaces for mental development needs to go hand in hand with strong enforcement of basic, i.e., healthy humanist norms. Efforts to understand the deeper concerns of populist or extremist voters must not imply tolerance of anti-social or violent behavior. Neither can these efforts serve as an excuse to allow the basic pillars of democracy, such as the universal rule of law, an independent judiciary, or strong public broadcast media to be undermined.

The capacity for this shift of mindset towards a more Integral approach, however, needs to be built primarily among leaders of society, not among the New Marginalized. Many of the

New Marginalized are not at the Green Stage, so they cannot be expected to jump to Integral Stage. The chances are that the more the leaders display such integrating qualities, the more the rest of society will both accept their leadership and move up to the next respective higher stages. While the former contributes a great deal to reducing the demand for populists, the latter leads to what might hopefully become a part a positive vision for our civilization: Less Centrifugal, more Integral Societies.

VI. Towards Leadership with a More Comprehensive Balance

The real message behind the populist surge is not necessarily that Western populations wish for a more closed, divided and authoritarian society. Rather, large swathes of society are calling for leaders to **fundamentally change** their attitude – to provide them more existential security, more social esteem, a healthy social order and to slow down the civilizational centrifuge. It is as if they have screamed: “We’re falling off!” .

In the short run, the political edges of the divides in a Centrifugal Society can be softened by removing the immediate political **triggers** of these votes for more extremist parties and movements. Much of such political crisis management is currently being attempted everywhere in the West, most notably via the reduction of immigration flows, by limiting trade, by increasing domestic security or redistribution measures.

In the long run, however, it seems that the other edges (cultural, psychological, social and economic) of the divides in a Centrifugal Society are likely to recede only if a divisive, fragmenting **lead worldview** is replaced by a more stable, centripetal type of societal leadership.

If the center of society is to become populated enough for democracy and the social order to stabilize again, then the mainstream parties need to become more Integral. However, that should be accompanied by a focus on ensuring shared information through a more substantial role for quality public broadcast media, as well as a sustainable economy with a sufficient offer of meaningful, reasonably demanding jobs, including in personal and cultural development.

NGOs putting more emphasis on fairness rather than on equality, on listening and dialogue rather than on preaching, and on reaching out to the “bottom 60%” rather than just the “bottom 10%” cannot be achieved by compromising the progressive achievements of the last century (or more), such as universal human rights, the rule of law, or free speech.

However, neither can we move a level up in the **evolution of our consciousness, values and organizational structures** – in the way we perceive and think of the world and our role in it – by insisting that everything we have done so far was flawless.

If this think piece can provoke healthy self-reflection inside our “progressive bubble”, it may be a good start to promoting more balanced leadership for the challenges ahead of us.

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