

The 2020 U.S. presidential election, Trumpism and the roots of negative distrust

Erik Alfred Olsen

*University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands,
eaodakru@gmail.com*

Abstract. This article explores the role of negative distrust as applied to the 2020 U.S. presidential election focusing specifically on the campaign and supporters of President Donald J. Trump. I survey negative campaigning rhetoric, the enlistment of far-right militant groups to his cause and the general political discourse of the Trump campaign and its allies and how these elements created a dangerous environment within the United States leading to the 6 January attack on the U.S. Capitol. Furthermore, I examine how the sowing of conspiracy theories, fear and disinformation had led directly to a degradation of the presidential election process and for the first time in U.S. history, there was not a safe and smooth transfer of power from one presidential administration to another. Finally, I conclude how the active employment of negative distrust amongst the electorate contributes to political and national instability that threatens not merely constitutional crisis, but the invalidation of the electoral process in the United States in general.

Keywords: negative distrust, paranoid style, Trump, Trumpism, QAnon, 2020 election, transfer of power, president

For citation: Olsen, E.A. (2021), "The 2020 U.S. presidential election, Trumpism and the roots of negative distrust", *RSUH/RGGU Bulletin. "Political Science. History. International Relations" Series*, no. 2, pp. 67–79, DOI: 10.28995/2073-6339-2021-2-67-79

Президентские выборы 2020 г. в США, «трампизм» и истоки крайнего недоверия

Эрик Альфред Олсен

*Амстердамский университет, Амстердам, Нидерланды,
eaodakru@gmail.com*

Аннотация. Эта статья описывает роль крайнего недоверия применительно к президентским выборам 2020 г. в США, в особенности в отношении кампании и сторонников президента Дональда Трампа. Автор

изучает негативную риторику в отношении президентской кампании, привлечение ультраправых военных групп для достижения желаемого результата и общий политический дискурс президентской кампании Трампа и его соратников, а также то, как эти элементы способствовали созданию опасной ситуации внутри Соединенных Штатов Америки, приведших к штурму Капитолия в столице США 6 января 2020 г. Кроме того, он исследует, как рассеивание теорий заговора, страх и дезинформация привели к непосредственной деградации процесса президентских выборов в США и ситуации, в которой впервые за всю историю США передача власти от одной администрации президента к другой прошла не гладко. В завершение делается вывод о том, что активное использование крайнего недоверия среди избирателей способствует политической и национальной нестабильности, не только становясь угрозой для развития национального кризиса, но и способствуя признанию недействительным всего процесса выборов президента в США.

Ключевые слова: социальное недоверие, параноидальный стиль, Трамп, «трампизм», QAnon, выборы 2020, передача власти, президент

Для цитирования: Olsen E.A. The 2020 U.S. presidential election, Trumpism and the roots of negative distrust // Вестник РГГУ. Серия «Политология. История. Международные отношения». 2021. № 2. С. 67–79. DOI: 10.28995/2073-6339-2021-2-67-79

The 2020 presidential election has presented unprecedented political challenges at both the governmental level as well as among an increasingly fractious electorate. If one factor can be cited for maintaining the almost 250 years of stable government in the United States, it would be the smooth transition of power from one presidential administration to another. Despite some heated campaigns, the contest has always ended with one side claiming triumph and the defeated concluding that they would honor the loss and endeavor to win four years later. The 2020 election, like many things in our lives that year, was different. These concerns were articulated by Peter Nicholas in his *The Atlantic* article, “Trump Could Still Break Democracy’s Biggest Norm”¹. What would happen to the American Experiment, not just in the short term but for the future of the United States, if a sitting President refused to honor election results and intended to

¹ Nicholas, P. (2020), “Trump Could Still Break Democracy’s Biggest Norm”, *The Atlantic*. June 16, available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/06/when-does-trump-leave-white-house/613060/> (Accessed 18 Aug. 2020).

stay in office despite the two and a half centuries of stable government and precedent?

At the governmental level, officials and stakeholders have already begun to address this concern. At the end of July this year *The Boston Globe* reported that in late June a bi-partisan group including, “political operatives, former government and military officials, and academics” met online to engage in a role-play exercise on how a contested election would play out². Among the scenarios gamed, included: if President Trump refused to concede a loss, publicly hinted that he might not concede, and then how far he would go to try and retain the Presidency? In every scenario the group concluded that there would be varying levels of street violence and political deadlock. In each case where a close result was gamed, the 11 weeks between the election and Inauguration Day was dominated by political maneuvering by both candidates as the Trump side rallied his supporters and sought to use every lever of power available, the Biden people tried to fight through the courts and neither side was willing to concede. The overall conclusion was that in what is likely to be a close election in November, there are few actual mechanisms to prevent a Constitutional crisis especially if, as anticipated, President Trump used the vast authority vested to him in order to retain power. However, the results of the election did not turn out to be close at all, Biden won the 2020 contest by a significant share of electoral college votes over President Trump.

Now that the election has been decided decisively in favor of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, despite unsuccessful legal challenges from the Trump campaign to invalidate the results from certain states, the worst fears of some have been realized. Facing likely criminal prosecution in the city and state of New York, President Trump vainly called upon his supporters to demand that he be installed for a second term regardless of the actual election results³. On 6 January 2021, the day that both chambers of Congress were set to certify the results of the Electoral College and formally recognize President-elect Biden as the 46th President of the United States, thousands of supporters of Donald

² Bidgood, J. (2020), “A bipartisan group secretly gathered to game out a contested Trump-Biden election. It wasn’t pretty”, *The Boston Globe*, July 26, available at: <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/07/25/nation/bipartisan-group-secretly-gathered-game-out-contested-trump-biden-election-it-wasnt-pretty/> (Accessed 01 Aug. 2020).

³ Rashbaum, W.K. and Weiser, B. “As Soon as Trump Leaves Office, He Faces Greater Risk of Prosecution”, *The New York Times*, Nov. 13, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/13/nyregion/trump-taxes.html> (Accessed 19 Dec. 2020).

Trump converged on the National Mall. These supporters were treated to speeches from not only the President, but his children as well as close advisors such as former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani. All of whom extolled their patriotism and commitment to overturning the election results, with Trump even admonishing the crowd that they would only win through the use of force against Congress members⁴. The day ended with hundreds of Trump supporters storming the Capitol building, and disrupting the election certification until police were able to restore order and expel the insurrectionists.

How did the United States get to this point? In order to answer this, I would like to discuss the phenomenon of Negative Distrust in American politics. What do I mean by “Negative Distrust”? As opposed to “Positive Distrust” that is marked by healthy skepticism, Negative Distrust creates distorted images of one’s political opponents through statements made by politicians, supporters and media personalities. Eri Bertsou in his article, “Rethinking Political Distrust”, noted that most scholarship has in the past focused on issues related to positive aspects of trust. His work instead focused on the concept of what he termed, “political distrust”. Bertsou contrasts these two concepts, arguing, “that citizen distrust of government and political institutions poses a threat for democratic politics and clarifies the relationship between the distrust observed in established democracies and classical ‘liberal distrust’, which is considered beneficial for democracy” [Bertsou 2019, pp. 213–214].

Marc Hetherington and Jonathan Ladd in their article, “Destroying Trust in the Media, Science and Government Has Left America Vulnerable to Disaster”, examine the attacks made by President Trump on essential institutions and how this has translated into negative distrust amongst his support base. However, the authors are quick to point out that Trump’s attacks are not without precedent, “It is easy to think these are just examples of Trump’s unorthodox political style. Yet he is merely the apotheosis of a political approach that has animated much of the conservative movement for a half century or more: undermining trust in the media, science and government”⁵.

⁴ Savage, C. (2021), “Incitement to Riot? What Trump Told Supporters Before Mob Stormed Capitol”, *The New York Times*, Jan. 10, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/10/us/trump-speech-riot.html> (Accessed 13 Jan 2021).

⁵ Hetherington, M. and Ladd, J.M. “Destroying trust in the media, science, and government has left America vulnerable to disaster”, *Brookings*, May 01, available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2020/05/01/destroying-trust-in-the-media-science-and-government-has-left-america-vulnerable-to-disaster/> (Accessed 03 Jan. 2021).

The seminal treatise on negative distrust is Richard Hofstadter's essay, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" first published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1964. Hofstadter used the term "paranoid style" to discuss negative distrust, which he clearly framed as a pejorative. He wrote, "I call it the paranoid style simply because no other word adequately evokes the sense of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy that I have in mind"⁶. The main subject Hofstadter used to illustrate his thesis were the supporters of Barry Goldwater (R-AZ) in the leadup to his 1968 presidential ambitions. Goldwater, in a period that produced many such figures, was an exceptionally right-wing hawk. The ferocious nationalism expressed by Goldwater was noteworthy even in this hyper-nationalist period.

Of Goldwater's followers, Hofstadter wrote, "In recent years we have seen angry minds at work, mainly among the extreme right-wingers, who have now demonstrated in the Goldwater movement how much political leverage can be got out of the animosities and passions of a small minority"⁷. He added, "In the paranoid style, as I conceive it, the feeling of persecution is central, and it is indeed systemized by grandiose theories of conspiracy"⁸. Hofstadter noted that unlike clinical paranoids, those of the political persuasion see threats not to their individual self, but to the country at large, their cultural identification or more abstractly their way of life. Perhaps one can find some contemporary relevance when this is applied to people who decried that they had "lost their country" following the election of Barrack Obama [Walker 2011], or more recently to supporters of the Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement headed by President Donald J. Trump [Eddington 2018].

Hofstadter reminds us of an important point. That he is not a clinician who is making a diagnosis, but instead when Hofstadter discusses the "Paranoid Style", it is how it applies to otherwise normal functioning people. He wrote, "It is the use of paranoid modes of expression by more or less normal people that makes the phenomenon significant"⁹. So where does this political paranoia amongst mentally healthy people originate? The first thing that Hofstadter points out is how this form of negative distrust manifests, "Style has more to do with the way ideas

⁶ Hofstadter, R. (1964), "The Paranoid Style in American Politics", *Harper's Magazine*, P. 77, available at: <https://harpers.org/archive/1964/11/the-paranoid-style-in-american-politics/> (Accessed 03 Aug. 2020).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

are believed than with the truth or falsity of their content”¹⁰. He then noted that political rhetoric drives political psychology and the most severe forms of negative distrust are linked to movements in which one finds severe discontent. One only need look at the last two presidencies in the US to see how the paranoid style manifested in the opponents of Barrack Obama and then in supporters of Donald Trump. These people, not coincidentally largely make up the same group.

1. The Election of Barrack Obama 2008 and the Tea Party

When President Obama was first elected to office in 2008 there were two distinct groups that appeared. The first group were those people who voted for and supported Mr. Obama. The second, who are of interest here, are those people who voted against and stood in opposition to Obama’s presidency. The sense of outrage and rejection that this second group expressed was without historical precedent, their reliance on Negative Distrust was even more so. In a paper delivered to the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in 2011, Alan Abramowitz of Emory University discussed the rise of the anti-Obama movement in a paper titled, “Partisan Polarization and the Rise of the Tea Party Movement”. Abramowitz noted that the emergence of the Tea Party movement was in line with an increasingly conservative trend amongst Republican Party voters since the 1970s and that Tea Party members represented the most conservative members amongst Republicans, and therefore the most outspoken elements relying upon Negative Distrust rhetorical styles. Moreover, “While conservatism is by far the strongest predictor of support for the Tea Party movement, racial hostility also has a significant impact on support” [Abramowitz 2011]. Much in the same vein that Hofstadter described the Goldwater movement as one where the rightwing political elite played upon the fears and prejudices of Republicans, so too does Abramowitz see the rise of the Tea Party movement and rhetoric associated with it in much the same light. He writes,

It is clear that right-wing organizations such as Americans for Prosperity and Freedom Works have provided important logistical support for the movement and that conservative media figures, mainly associated with Fox News, have played crucial roles in publicizing and encouraging attendance at Tea Party rallies. However, these efforts could not have succeeded without the existence of a large, receptive audience among the public [Abramowitz 2011].

In their work *Change They Can't Believe In*, authors Christopher Parker and Matt Barreto noted many of the same trends in their analysis of Tea Party members. The authors asserted that Negative Distrust political rhetoric originating from those associated at all levels of the Tea Party had relied upon conspiratorial language in order to press their points. Assertions often utilized misinformation and referenced conspiracy theories [Parker, Barreto 2014]. The practice was so pernicious that analysis by the news verification site Politifact had routinely labeled Tea Party associated statements as ranging from “Mostly False” to their most deceptive label, “Pants on Fire”. Among the most dishonest statements was that Obama’s presidency was illegitimate because he was not a natural born U.S. citizen as required by the Constitution. Increasingly, conspiratorial calls to produce birth records by far-right voices in the media and among the public, including future President Trump, would hound Obama through his entire two terms in office.

2. The Election of Donald Trump, MAGA and the Post-Election Response amongst Trump Supporters

If the election of Barrack Obama evidenced how political opponents relied upon the Negative Distrust to explain the ascendancy of a particular president, the 2016 election of Donald Trump was unprecedented in the scope and degree to which Negative Distrust manifested from the new President’s supporters. For those who voted for and supported President Trump, one theme popularized from his campaign was the simple slogan, “Make America Great Again”. A statement that carried with it the culmination of decades long elements of Negative Distrust-based ideology sown into and amongst the most conservative elements of the American public, government and media structures.

One can see the “Make America Great Again” movement as the natural successor to the waning Tea Party movement. This slogan encapsulated the anxieties, hopes as well as the evolution of white conservative politics and its reliance of negative distrust rhetoric. As a retrospective term it harkens to some past Neverland where white conservative voters held absolute supremacy over the national discourse. It harnesses a longing among its supporters for a return to a white-dominated society seen as lost to a collection of race-traitors, racial and gender minorities, leftists and their collaborators, in both government and the media. Central to this mentality among proponents is the sense of embattlement and victimhood. Moreover, Donald Trump was often portrayed as being the torchbearer for these disenfranchised conservatives who feel that the destiny of the country is one in which their ideology is supreme.

The most intense form of negative distrust in this narrative manifested as failures of government, the media and other institutions in safeguarding the white conservative. Sean Eddington in his article, “The Communicative Constitution of Hate Organizations Online: A Semantic Network Analysis of ‘Make America Great Again’”, wrote that “... Donald Trump, has long been characterized as a beacon for and mouthpiece of hate speech in both offline and online contexts...” [Eddington 2018]. He adds, “Whereas journalists have sought to link his [Trump’s] rhetoric to hate groups, and have successfully demonstrated a mimicked rhetoric that is used by groups, this study found direct connections within the text corpus to #MAGA both in the overall semantic content and in the hashtag network” [Eddington 2018]. Eddington noted that the MAGA hashtag served through Negative Distrust appeals as a means of uniting white supremacists. Moreover, it served as a potent political tool for rallying supporters and their distrust of government and social institutions with their perception of being betrayed and victimized. At its heart MAGA capitalizes on negative distrust instincts among the conservative and rightwing portions of the electorate.

Another manifestation of the modern incarnation of negative distrust in the Trump era is the conspiracy theory/group known as “QAnon”. Unlike traditional conspiracy theories that tends to either focus on one event such as: the U.S. moon landing, the JFK assassination or the 9/11 terror attacks, and target as the culprit of the conspiracy one group such as: Jewish people, Catholics, the CIA, or Freemasons; the QAnon conspiracy theory instead encompasses a wide variety of smaller conspiracies and perpetrators from foreign states, to Hollywood figures and politicians, to institutional actors such as the CIA and the major media. Claims made include such things as Michelle Obama is actually a man in disguise making President Obama a closet homosexual, to secret caves where babies are raised and harvested for sacrifice in order to maintain the youth of the satanic worshipping elites such as Hillary Clinton, Ellen DeGeneres, and other people in politics and the entertainment industry. The Covid-19 pandemic is claimed to be a Deep State invention where the subsequent vaccine is not what it is purported to be but instead a way to control the population via microchips. 5G technology is also purported by QAnon followers to be another mind control technology. Donald Trump, according to adherents, is singularly in place to stop it all, and is backed by patriotic elements of the military¹¹.

¹¹ Forrest, B. (2021), “What Is QAnon? What We Know About the Conspiracy-Theory Group”, *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 4, available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/what-is-qanon-what-we-know-about-the-conspiracy-theory-11597694801> (Accessed 10 Jan. 2021).

QAnon conspiracy rhetoric originated in October 2017 from the 4Chan website message boards and an anonymous poster calling itself “Q”. The individual or group identifying as “Q” claimed to have a high-level U.S. security clearance known as “Q clearance” and disseminated messages to adherents via “breadcrumbs” or “Q drops”. While identifying people, groups or conspiracy theories that are in opposition to white conservative American values, the messages were also laced with pro-Trump propaganda. Because of the wide-ranging accusations leveled by “Q”, even supporters admit that it is all unprovable, but that they believe it nonetheless¹². The manifests as the essence of Negative Distrust that strikes at the heart of Hofstadter’s thesis in the 1960s and presents an existential threat to democratic institutions as evidenced on 6 January in Washington, D.C.

In the post-election milieu, this hyper-loyalty to President Trump has metastasized into a national crisis. Since 3 November and the presumptive win by Joe Biden, Donald Trump sought to marshal his forces in and outside of government to challenge the electoral results with the goal of overturning the election¹³. After a spate of losses in state and federal courts the President curried favor amongst sympathetic Congress members to object the Congressional certification of the Electoral College results to take place on 6 January 2021¹⁴.

In the most stunning turn of events, after a rally held that day led by Trump and his children, the attendees stormed the Capitol and broke into the building while Congress members were in session certifying the election. Footage of the event captured the insurrectionists claiming their purpose was to overturn the election and take control of the government¹⁵. While the political fallout is still playing out, there were

¹² Wendling, M. (2020), “QAnon: What is it and where did it come from?”, *BBC News*, Jan. 6, available at: URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/53498434> (Accessed 12 Jan. 2021).

¹³ Williams, P. and Rada, N.V. (2020), “Trump’s election fight includes over 50 lawsuits. It’s not going well”, *NBCNews.com*, Nov. 23, available at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2020-election/trump-s-election-fight-includes-over-30-lawsuits-it-s-n1248289> (Accessed 03 Jan. 2021).

¹⁴ Hurley, L. (2021), “U.S. Supreme Court shuns election-related disputes”, *Reuters*, Jan. 12, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-court-election/u-s-supreme-court-shuns-election-related-disputes-idUSKBN29G1UF> (Accessed 13 Jan. 2021).

¹⁵ Barry, D., McIntire, M. and Rosenberg, M. (2021), “ ‘Our President Wants Us Here’: The Mob That Stormed the Capitol”, *The New York Times*, Feb. 5, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/09/us/capitol-rioters.html> (Accessed 10 Jan 2021).

calls from Congress members, within the media and even amongst allies of the President to either immediately remove Trump from office through the use of the 25th Amendment or by impeachment and conviction in Congress.

Moreover, the desperate attempt to coup the government was not merely ill planned, but ill conceived. Historically most members of Congress have shown a great deal of pride in their role and in their institution. This direct attack was not merely on the body of the Congressional members, the Capitol building, but also the symbolic institution of Congress itself. The resulting fallout led to an immediate drop in support amongst supporters of the President according to Pew Research Center findings¹⁶. Bi-partisan statements were made by party leaders reiterating their allegiance to the government, the Constitution and to Congress and in the strongest terms condemned not only the insurrectionists, but the President as well for his role in the debacle¹⁷. In the days following the attempted insurrection of the government, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi along with other members began issuing an impeachment threat in the final days of President Trump's term. The most notable aspect of these calls has been their bi-partisan nature in a time of otherwise hyper-partisan politics, and a full-throated rejection of Negative Distrust rhetoric aimed at invalidating the 2020 election results¹⁸. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell stated on the Senate floor in response to efforts by some Congress members to overturn the election results,

We're debating a step that has never been taken in American history, whether Congress should overrule the voters and overturn a presidential election. I've served 36 years in the Senate and this will be the most important vote I ever cast. President Trump claims the election was

¹⁶ Biden Begins Presidency with Positive Ratings; Trump Departs With Lowest-Ever Job Mark (2021), *Pew Research Center – U.S. Politics & Policy*, Jan. 15, available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/01/15/biden-begins-presidency-with-positive-ratings-trump-departs-with-lowest-ever-job-mark/> (Accessed 18 Jan. 2021).

¹⁷ Abril, D. (2021), "Congress members under siege in Capitol tweet their shock and frustration", *Fortune Magazine*, Jan. 6, available at: <https://fortune.com/2021/01/06/dc-riots-tweets-congress-senators-representatives-reactions-capitol-mob-2020-election-trump-supporters/> (Accessed 09 Jan 2021).

¹⁸ Warren, M., Gangel, J. and Acosta, J. (2021), "Angry Republican leaders float removing Trump from office", *CNN*, Jan. 6, available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/01/06/politics/trump-capitol-impeachment-25-amendment/index.html> (Accessed 09 Jan 2021).

stolen, the assertions range from certain local allegations to Constitutional arguments to sweeping conspiracy theories... If this election were overturned by mere allegations from the losing side our democracy would enter a death spiral. We would never see the whole nation accept an election again¹⁹.

In the aftermath of the failed coup a number of disturbing allegations have been uncovered about the goals of the insurrectionists. Among them was how prepared they were on the 6th of January. A significant number of the Trump rally attendees arrived with arms, including Molotov cocktails, pipe bombs and other devices such as police-style zip tie handcuffs and various forms of bulletproof vests, ballistic helmets and similar gear²⁰. During the insurrection five people were killed in the immediate event or in the aftermath, including two police officers. One particularly disturbing video shows one Capitol police officer laying on the steps leading into the Capitol building as the violent mob began to beat him with various implements including flagpoles carrying the American flag and improvised weapons such as a fire extinguisher. This officer later died from complications resulting from the trauma²¹. Moreover, the formerly pro-police sentiment amongst these hardline Trump supporters has begun to turn. Where only six months ago groups such as the 3%'ers, Proud Boys, Boogaloo Boys and other pro-Trump white nationalist groups made dramatic expressions of support for the pro-police "Back the Blue" movement that opposed Black Lives Matter and other police reform efforts, these same right-wing groups are now repudiating the police as traitors in the strongest terms possible. Only a few nights after 6 January a Proud Boys demonstration in Salem, Oregon had supporters stepping on a "Back the Blue" flag and challenging police in the streets until they were forcibly dispersed by authorities.

¹⁹ Sanford, C. (2021), "Mitch McConnell Senate Speech Transcript January 6: Rejects Efforts to Overturn Presidential Election Results", *Rev.*, Jan. 6, available at: <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/mitch-mcconnell-senate-speech-on-election-confirmation-transcript-january-6> (Accessed 09 Jan 2021).

²⁰ Schapiro, R. (2021), "Stun guns, 'stinger whips' and a crossbow: What police found on the Capitol protesters", *NBCNews.com*, Jan. 13, available at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/stun-guns-stinger-whips-cross-bow-what-police-found-capitol-protesters-n1254127> (Accessed 18 Jan. 2021).

²¹ Hill, E., Ray, A. and Kozlowsky, D. (2021), " 'They Got a Officer!': How a Mob Dragged and Beat Police at the Capitol", *The New York Times*, Jan. 11, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/11/us/capitol-mob-violence-police.html> (Accessed 31 Jan. 2021).

Conclusion

With the electoral loss of Donald Trump and his failure to secure a second term in office, and the anticipation of legal action by the Attorney General of New York State awaiting his return to civilian life, Trump has not easily given into defeat. His supporters, exhibiting the worst aspects of Negative Distrust, likewise already primed to believe that his loss could only come about by the cheating of Biden supporters, have roundly rejected this outcome. This places the United States into very dangerous territory where for the first time in the history of the Republic, a smooth transition from one president to another or a smooth continuance of an administration from one term to another was not accomplished. The most dramatic example of this was the 6 January Trump rally and subsequent storming of the Capitol building by his supporters in an effort to halt the Constitutionally mandated ratification of the Electoral College and finalization of the victory of Joe Biden.

In U.S. history there have always been sophistic politicians, intellectuals and media figures interested in gaining either political power or monetizing the anger and outrage of a target group. During the tenure of Donald Trump and coming to an apex in the 2020 election and subsequent months, the paranoid style of American politics as practiced in the 21st century has taken on new shapes. Among those groups who claim their ultimate allegiance to the country and Constitution, we saw members trying to stage a violent overthrow of the government in order to install their chosen leader. This is not merely a difference of political tastes, but formed an existential threat to the society as a whole and the most dangerous expressions of a reliance on Negative Distrust to guide political perceptions and actions.

If politicians and other figures in society choose to play to the basest fears and prejudices of their voter bases, they are in danger of creating a Frankenstein-type monster whose capacity for mischief and existential damage cannot be overstated. In the days after 6 January, Trump-aligned groups and individuals were still conspiring to overturn the 2020 results. These events are still unfolding, and the extent of the impact of Donald Trump, QAnon, and Trumpism in general is impossible to illustrate. However, as investigations are conducted by both government and media actors, areas of further research into the impact of the Negative Distrust as manifested in the Trump era can be better understood.

References

- Abramowitz, A.I. (2011), "Partisan Polarization and the Rise of the Tea Party Movement", *APSA Annual Meeting Paper*, available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1903153 (Accessed 9 Aug. 2020).
- Bertsou, E. (2019), "Rethinking political distrust", *European Political Science Review*, vol. 11, issue 2, pp. 213–230, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1755773919000080> (Accessed 9 Aug. 2020).
- Eddington, S.M. (2018), "The Communicative Constitution of Hate Organizations Online: A Semantic Network Analysis of 'Make America Great Again' ". *Social Media + Society*, vol. 4, issue 3, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118790763> (Accessed 9 Aug. 2020).
- Parker, C.S. and Barreto, M.A. (2014), *Change they can't believe in: the Tea Party and reactionary politics in America*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press. Kindle Edition.
- Walker, C.E. (2011), " 'We're losing our country': Barack Obama, Race & the Tea Party", *Daedalus*, vol. 140, no. 1, pp. 125–130, available at: https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00064 (Accessed 9 Aug. 2020).

Information about the author

Erik A. Olsen, Ph.D. (History, American Studies), University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; 134 Spuistraat, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 1012 VB; eaodak@gmail.com

Информация об авторе

Эрик А. Олсен, Ph.D. (история, американские исследования), Амстердамский университет, Амстердам, Нидерланды; 134 Spuistraat, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 1012 VB; eaodak@gmail.com