

## **The Perversion of Populism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Ideology of the Elites and the Masses**

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The 2016 election saw the rise of Donald Trump, a businessman with no prior political experience, to the presidency in a wave of populism. Yet, was it really populism in the traditional sense? While he lost in 2020 there was an insurrection attempting to overturn the results, despite policies from his administration that supported the wealthy and elites. This paper examines how populism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been perverted to support the elites, the methods that have been used to spread elite ideologies, and finally recommends some actions to address democracy in the future. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: [journal@transformativestudies.org](mailto:journal@transformativestudies.org) Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2023 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The 2016 and 2020 election cycles were highlighted by astounding phenomena. First, there was an increase in voter turn-out in the 2020 election – more people voting for either candidate than ever before in U.S. history. There has also been an increase in vitriol and language meant to damage the other side (Gerstlé and Nai 2019). Finally, questions about truth and reality have risen to the forefront, mostly due to technology and the algorithms of social media, in a manner that has never been seen before. Indeed, post-modern critiques of politics have made their way into the mainstream media with the invention of terms such as “alternative facts.” What is interesting, however, is that these debates, which had traditionally been the output of academia, have

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