

# Savagery in right-wing populist leadership: between theatricality and political social engineering

SOCIETY REGISTER  
2022 / 6(4): 7–24  
ISSN: 2544–5502  
DOI: 10.14746/sr.2022.6.4.01



Filip Pierzchalski<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Warsaw, Faculty of Political Science and International Studies, Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28, 00-927 Warszawa, Poland. ORCID: 0000-0002-0476-5495, Email: f.pierzchalski@uw.edu.pl

**ABSTRACT:** Contemporary leadership practices in politics are full of emotions, which, on the one hand, may be a manifestation of various types of expressions or moods in the individual and collective dimension, and on the other hand, are an important source of political mobilization or an instrument enhancing effectiveness in the election competition. In this article inducing and politicizing savagery among followers—defined as an emotional social engineering strategy for articulating given goals and interests—will be treated as a populist manifestation and an expression of planned radicalization of political competition. The aim of the article is a meta theoretical reflection on the instrumentalisation of wildness in the leadership of the right-wing populist—Donald Trump. A practical rationale for discussing collective savagery in politics will be the attack on the Capitol in Washington on January 6, 2021. This event will serve as an example to explain the political exteriorization of the confrontational Trump followers, thanks to which the right-wing populist leader not only articulated his own goals, shaped public self-presentation or theatrical political presence, but also redefined and challenged the existing rules and principles of democratic political culture.

**KEYWORDS:** savagery, theatricality of politics, social engineering of emotions, political leadership, right-wing populism, Donald Trump

## INTRODUCTION

When a dissatisfied and enraged crowd stormed in Washington on January 6, 2021—precisely the supporters of the defeated US presidential candidate Donald Trump—we witnessed not only a political act of “uncontrolled savagery” or the use of direct physical violence and verbal aggression in a public place, but it was also a

moment to illustrate right-wing political extremism. In a broader context, it involves both generating collective identities based on oppositions between “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite” and usually involve affective allegiances to a charismatic leader, as well as about illiberal, nationalist, autocratic or post-fascist tendencies and changes within contemporary democratic regimes, which are related to, inter alia, with the phenomenon of democratic fascism, ethnocentric liberalism or the development of the radical right populism (ideological combining three components: nativism, authoritarianism and populism). To some extent, it is also an example of planned political action, which on the one hand was an empirical illustration of angry populism, and on the other hand became a confirmation of the assumptions of the cultural backlash theory that showed Donald Trump as a postfascist leader without fascism (Mudde, 2007, p. 23; Mudde, Kaltwasser, 2012, p. 7; Griffin, 2017, pp. 15-27; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, pp. 110-128; Norris, Inglehart, 2019, pp. 32-84; Traverso, 2019, pp. 20-26; Mayer, 2021, pp. 17-31). From the perspective of social engineering influences, this savage assault of right-wing extremist activists can be treated as an exemplification of the negative formula of expressive subjectivity. An expression that can be treated as a symptom of a planned, purposeful and to some extent conscious and controlled affective-manipulative strategy. I mean here the political strategy of the defeated president, which was not only supposed to be—by definition—political retaliation against the opponent, but also became a negative form of affective mobilization and, consequently, long-term accreditation building and praise for Trump in the populist “power game”. In other words, it is possible—and more importantly, it is successfully done—to conventionally analyse this event as an act of spontaneous and uncontrolled crowd aggression in a democratic state or political vandalism “at the behest” of a sophisticated Republican Party candidate, but, at the same time, one can look at and explain the “Tramp coup” in terms of the social engineering of emotions within the leadership of a right-wing populist.

The aim of this article is an attempt at a political science analysis at the meta-theoretical level of the relationship of interdependence at the interface: political orientation of emotions ↔ form and the content of populist leadership, which is a key premise for the formation of collective expressive subjectivity among followers, and, consequently, for social accreditation and political legitimacy of the right-wing leader. In this sense, the phenomenon of “wild mob” and / or “collective madness” at the Capitol will not be taken as a violent reaction to a specific political situation, but will be explained as a form of extreme agency—more specifically as a manifestation of collective exteriors of confrontational politics. The causes which—treated as an emotional instrument of gaining influence and benefits—are both an important element of focusing attention in the public space, as well as an effective social engineering mechanism through which political entities (social groups, organizations, citizens, presidential candidate, etc.) not only articulate—and often cynically want to pursue—their own goals, interests or needs, but also shape public self-presentation or their own political presence.

---

## POLITICS AS THEATRE

The starting point for discussing the phenomenon of instrumental excitation and use in the political rivalry of savage emotions by right-wing populists, it is quite obvious and conventional to say that diverse emotions—defined as: „episodic, relatively short-term, biologically based patterns of perception, experience, physiology, action, and communication that occur in response to specific physical and social challenges and opportunities” (Keltner, Gross, 1999, p. 468)—are the source of shared life and collective coexistence. In other words, emotions cannot be treated only as an individual reaction or a subjective experience resulting from interactions with the external environment and other people, but must also take into account their social and / or collective nature. This is to emphasize that in political science analyses emotions that are diversified in form and content can be, and often are, the source of the formation of supra-individual identities or mobilisations (emotions in-groups), as well as they contribute to the emergence of various types of experiences that always appear and (only) in the presence of other members of a group, stratum, social class, etc. It involves capturing the moment when political practices become to some extent dependent on the process of emotional sharing (emotions out-groups) or are gradually conditioned by a mechanism called emotional contagion in psychology. We are talking here about the synchronisation of individual people’s attention, their expression or behaviour, which are synonymous with the generation and reproduction of supra-individual emotions or moods, or the realisation of an intersubjective transfer of affective states between people (Keltner, Oatley, Jenkins, 2014, p. 227; Clark, Brissette, 2000, pp. 212-240; Hatfield, Cacioppo, Rapson, 1994, pp. 7-11).

In such circumstances, emotions can be perceived as the basis of all political activity, where political metaphors as theatrical scenes seem useful. Scenes where populists in the public space are treated in the first place as actors of politics who carry out broadly understood dramatic activities (feigned, apparent, imitating activity, etc.). These are entities that are, in the first place, hypocrites (Karwat, 2003, pp. 291-316), which means that they often consciously and deliberately wear various masks (desired and expected roles, functions, creations, etc., political), thanks to which they can start playing a “game of appearances” or they can run a festival of deceptive “performances”. Both things support and serve the self-presentation of the actors, as well as enable the performance of dramatic staging. Politics becomes a constantly staged spectacle-performance that takes place on a shared scene that is experienced and emotionally engaging. The scenes become spaces where political actors seek the attention of a diverse audience—public attention and accreditation; where political activities involve active “role play”; where political practice is a part of a scheme or a spontaneously implemented exhibition or demonstration by politicians or political parties; where there is a production varied in form and content, duplication and authentication of meanings, symbols or rituals, inherent in the emergence of some emotions, feelings or moods among the broadly understood electorate (among others Kertzer, 1988, pp. 77-101; Pierzchalski, 2013, pp. 155-185). It is a place where not only the dominant production relations and ownership structure play a key role and func-

tion, but also—or perhaps mainly—cultural factors do (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 68-168). It means culturally shaped and practised semiosis (a widespread semantic and interpretative system), thanks to which the rulers are not only able to effectively force their own goals, interests, needs, preferences, etc. in given specific-political conditions, or gradually influence and affect perception, thinking and action of the rulers, but also in a controlled—and often implicit—way to co-shape the current opinions, desired lifestyles, created needs of the rulers. In this approach, political practice every time establishes certain formulas of dependence, power, domination, etc. based on a given natural language, duplicated semiosis and the symbolic-meaning sphere or the obligatory discourses. For example, politics can be perceived as an expression of cultural hegemony, where the importance of culture is emphasized in the context of shaping a dynamic relationship at the junction of: ruling (political elite) ↔ ruled (broadly understood electorate). Under such assumptions, politics becomes a shared, mediatized and mediated (representational) cultural semantic-discursive practice, in which the emotional, ideological and imaginative planes play an important role and function. They translate not only into the forms of organization or the structuring of social life within the antagonized inter-subject space, but also serve to disseminate certain ways of “giving meaning” to the participants of socio-political practices (as Charles Taylor said in the spirit of creating and sharing by people “social imaginary”) (Hall, 1992, pp. 273-325; Hall, 1997, pp. 15-30; Hall, 2019, p. 306; Taylor, 2004, pp. 23-30).

It should also be added that this is the moment when there is a kind of redefinition of the traditional and institutional concept of political power. Power itself is not merely a synonym for the use of coercion and / or the practical use of governing specific abilities and / or resources on the part of the rulers, but it is a performative practice that takes place and shapes between the ruled, the rulers, the media sphere and the public. For example, Jeffrey C. Alexander aptly described such a mechanism:

Power theories concentrating on resources or capacities leave out the independent shaping power of background symbols and forms, the figures and forms of script, the contingency of *mise-en-scène* (literally “putting into the scene”—emph. *F. P.*) and actor interpretation, and the extraordinary significance of audience separation. Perhaps most importantly of all, this approach neglects how performing power is always mediated by accounts of its meaning and effectiveness, via the intervention of reports by journalists and critics, and by the inchoate but deeply resonant currents of the public’s opinion (Alexander, 2011, p. 88).

As Pierre Rosanvallon stated, all the above treatments related to theatricality and dramatic direction are carried out by the rulers only for one overriding goal—to give their functioning “visible and palpable coherence” and, consequently, to impose a certain level of control on the ruled and obtain real obedience (Rosanvallon, 2008, pp. 236-239). At the same time, they are practices in which language and the accompanying emotions are a medium of self-staging, where we observe the process of dramatization of politics. This means a conscious distortion of the image of politics and the biased reception of political practices, where the world represented (media-visual representation) becomes the real world. Words, writing and print have been replaced

by images—visible shapes that are more easily assimilated by a wide audience (recipients of political messages).

One can venture a statement that political practice is a theatre where any experience or interpersonal communication—especially the perception or interpretation of the political elite or political leaders by the ruled and followers—is simultaneously sensual-emotional as well as apparent, illusory, temporary, revocable, mediated, etc. In this sense, the metaphor of Guy Debord seems useful, as he emphasized that the contemporary world, including politics, for many people, groups or social classes is not a world lived directly, but always (and only) a form of shows—kind of cleverly planned and realized delusion. It is a world-place of ubiquitous and permanent spectacle, which is the social relationship between persons mediated by images (Debord, 1992, pp. 6-8). According to the author's intentions, we speak here about the society of the spectacle, where the spectacle is the "heart of this real society's unreality". Therefore:

In all of its particular manifestations news, propaganda, advertising, entertainment—the spectacle represents the dominant model of life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choices that have already been made in the sphere of production and in the consumption implied by that production. (...) Considered in its own terms, the spectacle is an affirmation of appearances and an identification of all human social life with appearances. (Debord, 1992, pp. 8-9)

### **INSTRUMENTALISATION OF EMOTIONS**

Bearing in mind the above theses, it can be said that the phenomenon of the theatricality of politics indicates not only the great elusiveness, artificiality, appearance or pageantry-like character of various political practices, but also refers to the comprehensive immersion and / or multiple dependencies of politics on the emotional sphere, and vice versa. In this approach, emotions are not only the carrier of a varied form and content of political activity—especially complex processes of leadership, governing or collective mobilization—but they are also a key component of political social engineering. We speak here about various, often manipulative or pseudo-persuasive, emotional interactions, which for leaders (more broadly: rulers) are a key technique—intentional, planned, targeted and purposeful action—of effective exercise or maintenance and realisation of leadership asymmetry. Hence, the essence of the emotional impact is the exposition of emotional-type measures by the leader-manipulator, which—as a rule—are to produce the desired effect in the broadly understood audience, and ultimately lead to the implementation of a previously defined goal, intention, task, priority, etc. such an interaction (message) communicates a specific body of values and often promotes a specific attitude towards them, which may or may not be a stimulus for specific emotions. In addition, it is worth emphasizing that the level of emotional arousal, its intensity, and ultimately the effectiveness of shaping attitudes, behaviour, reactions or broadly understood activity on the part of the audience (recipients of the message) depends, among others, on: communicated content; ways of expression and



communication; the environment in which the interaction takes place; the attitudes and worldview of recipients-followers (Kwiatkowski, 1974, pp. 153-155).

In such conditions, the steering subject—the populist leader—obtains the desired result, state of affairs, effect, etc. in the context of the attitudes, behaviour, perpetration, etc. of the controlled subject (e.g. the electorate, followers, citizens, etc.) by means of emotions. It happens where the control process in politics—more precisely—the interaction between the controlling and the controlled system—is based and / or each time refers to the mechanism of politicizing emotions, especially those functioning and rooted in the structural and social space. This is a moment when emotions are an instrument, means, tool, etc. for: achieving pre-defined goals; working out the planned result; pushing through your own plans, visions, ambitions, phobias, prejudices, etc.

At the same time, it should be taken into account that most messages in the political relationship of leadership contain some level of expressive and emotional load, which, on the one hand, makes the verbal and non-verbal formulas of political communication more attractive, and on the other hand enhances the effects of “experiencing” or shaping temporary political excitement—more broadly—building formulas for temporary compassion or searching for space for collective identifications and collective identities based on feelings and emotional expression. It means emotionalisation of the message, where a populist and / or a populist party (steering entity) is able to effectively, with the achievement of its own benefits or interests, exert an influence on supporters—the potential and real electorate (controlled object) (Czapów, Podgórecki, 1972, pp. 9-35; Podgórecki, 1968, pp. 9-34). At the same time, one cannot forget about the feedback in leadership asymmetry, where the process of emotional influence or affective control on the part of a political leader does not have to emphasize only his self-creation or does not have to be a sign of their ingenuity or social engineering agency. On the contrary, the process of leadership is always (and only) carried out in given specific-political conditions, which means that it is related and / or realised in many ways on the basis of a social mentality, against the background of the emotional and social climate in which the political leader functions. In other words, the effectiveness of the leader, their measurable influence and impact depends not only on his personal qualities, charisma, authority, or individual self-promotion and image-manipulative measures, but is conditioned by gradual compliance (or lack thereof) with social expectations; coincidence (or lack thereof) with feelings, emotions or moods in a given society. Therefore, political representativeness or the voluntary subordination of followers to the leader are not based only (and always) on the leader's temperament, personality, traits or emotional intelligence—including their ability to apply emotional strategies and social engineering tactics in practice—but also depend on external circumstances, the epoch's climate, social moods or shared emotionality by various participants in collective life.

Let us emphasize that it means going beyond the individual traits, psycho-bodily properties or manipulative skills of a political leader, in favour of structural and social environment, i.e. in favour of the diversified, shared and practiced emotionality of the followers. In this context, it is worth recalling Raymond Williams' con-

cept, for whom public political rituals, in the use of specific emotions, create “communities of feeling”, and ultimately they cause the formation and reproduction of the supra-individual “structure of feeling” (“social experiences in solution”) (Williams, 1977, pp. 128-135; Berezin, 2001, pp. 93-97). To some extent it is about the collective emotion management mechanism where the political leader, on the one hand, creates and consciously controls (turns up or extinguishes) “feelings’ rules”, on the other hand, in a convenient and beneficial way, it uses emotions, feelings and moods to confirm and authenticate one’s position, role, function, mission, uniqueness, etc. to followers (Hochschild, 1983, p. 18). However, such emotional and accreditation procedures on the part of a political leader may often take place in a spontaneous, not fully planned and controlled manner. It seems crucial, however, that the occurrence of a relational leadership asymmetry should be in line with the applicable specific-political conditions—more precisely with the applicable “emotional climate” (Barbalet 1998, pp. 157-161; Barbalet, Demertzis, 2013, pp. 167-185). It can be said that it is the realisation in leadership practice of a specific subjective-objective dialectic, where the subjective factors are the emotional intelligence of the leader, their skills in the field of emotional control on a mass scale, and the existing form, shape, content, quality, level, etc. of emotionality in the structural and social dimension. In this sense, emotions—by being part of the practices and social structure—not only co-create them, but also translate into its everyday functioning in many ways. In political leadership practice, it is symptomatic and means a situation in which the leader—wanting to be an effective and credible representative or an authentic personal role model, initiator or integrator for his own followers—must draw, use and relate, even to some extent share the emotionality of their own political base. This is the moment when the ways of thinking, living or experiencing of such individuals as social groups, classes or large collectives significantly influence and define the motivations, ambitions, visions, goals and interests of the political leader. Consequently, they translate into his strategies and leadership tactics, including the quantity, quality and formulas for using affective political social engineering techniques.

In addition, it should be noted that the manipulative potential of collective emotional states in social practices or politics has been described, explained and studied for a long time (among others Solomon, 2003; Plamper, 2012; Niedenthal, Ric, 2017; Kassab, 2016, pp. 25-80). It is worth recalling here the reflections of Elias Canetti from the 1920s, who—describing the concept of a pack and the category of human mass—referred to, *inter alia*, to affective factors as an important process and structure-forming element in the socio-political world. According to the author, the phenomenon of targeted sharing of feelings, emotions or moods—called *the discharge*—was a critical moment when anonymous, in fact unequal and without any sense of connection, members of some uncountable crowd (social group) “get rid of their differences and feel equal”. As suggested:

In the crowd the individual feels that he is transcending the limits of his own person. He has a sense of relief, for the distances are removed which used to throw him back on himself and shut him in. With the lifting of these burdens of

distance he feels free; his freedom is the crossing of these boundaries. He wants what is happening to him to happen to others too; and he expects it to happen to them. (Canetti, 1978, p. 20)

Let us add that, according to Canetti, we can give here numerous historical examples where the emotional and affective sphere—including various emotional expressions, feelings and moods—not only fill the masses, but also stimulate them, and are a key structural factor for their practical functioning. At the same time, emotions and feelings determine the density of the mass, giving it a rhythm and direction of movement or action (Canetti, 1978, pp. 48-92). In this approach, the basic task and / or the overriding goal of the rulers in politics in relation to the broad social masses is to develop some affective coherence or a uniform “emotional tinge”, which may be the basis for the formation of the foundations of community thinking, collective agency, supra-individual consciousness, emancipation or political activity.

Achieving such collective emotional-feeling coherence resembles the assumptions of the cognitive concept of collective intentionality described by John R. Searle, where the first priority is the achievement of common mental states among people – their attitudes, sensitivity, attitudes or feelings—which are shaped in a multifactorial process of the socialization and education—in broader terms—the cultural transmission. This means the moment when crossing of the subjective mind or first-person desires, beliefs, intentions, etc. occurs in order to develop and separate in the process of interaction and inter-subject exchange of supra-individual formulas of “We”. It is a situation in which particular individuals not only actually begin to cooperate with each other, but, more importantly, begin to share common thoughts, emotions and feelings, which at the same time become the source of their social or political activity (Searle, 1998, pp. 119-120).

Explaining the mechanism, “We” becomes a reality in the process of leadership, the metaphor that defines political leaders as entrepreneurs of identity and embedders of identity seems apt (Brown, 2020, pp. 114-116; Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011, pp. 137-196). In other words, the key point in this regard is that leadership is a process in which leaders must be:

Artists, impresarios, and engineers of identity—specifically, of a social identity that is shared with followers. Social identity, then, remains a key unifying construct. That is, the vision of leaders is a vision of who we are, what we value, and what sort of society would constitute our Eden. The shows provided by leaders are ritualized enactments of that Eden in which the forms of social being that “we” value are created within the rituals and ceremonies of the group itself. Finally, the structures and social realities created by the leader must be objectifications of the group identity. (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011, pp. 192-193)

It should be added, however, that in populist leadership, the emotional impact and / or emotionalisation of the political message on the part of the populist leader in relation to the followers will be the key instrument or element supporting the effectiveness of the implementation of leadership asymmetry. It is both about the use



of depersonalisation in the process of leadership, which affects the self-identification of the political leader and translates into the self-determination of the followers, and emphasizes the role and function of emotions in this process. In the first case, depersonalization is identified not so much with the “blurring” of individual followers against the leader, but rather with the perception of the political leader by the followers as a prototypical subject (personal pattern). Hence, with greater ease and more often, the voluntary submission of supporters occurs, which also translates into greater effectiveness and leadership agency. On the other hand, in the second case, emotions significantly accompany and co-create the form, quality and shape of depersonalisation, which ultimately promotes supra-individual identifications or collective forms of mobilisation (Hogg, 2001, pp. 323-349; Hogg, 2006, pp. 65-67; Turner, 1985, pp. 77-122).

Returning to the example of the attack on the Capitol, mentioned in the introduction, it can be stated that Trump’s instrumental emotional impact, combined with depersonalisation in the initial reception and evaluation, not only led to incompletely controlled aggression from right-wing extremist activists—including genuine followers of the president—but, more importantly, they became a reactive-emotional formula for controlled political mobilisation. Let us recall that the right-wing leader, through a directed and controlled negative emotional message, incited, “put the people up” and persuaded to storm, confront, fight, disobey, or even suggest the use of direct physical violence against opponents and his political opponents. In this regard, Trump’s “leadership credibility” or “magnetism” among the angered, negatively enthusiastic and disappointed crowd were the greater the more accurately he recognized, defined, specified and referred to the collective emotions and moods of the Republican Party supporters—more broadly—potential and actual followers. It can be assumed that as a right-wing and populist personal pattern he considered the emotion of savagery, both a catalyst and a future source of a return to the “power game”, and an effective instrument to stimulate and initiate political confrontational externalisation, which was to lead to public chaos, and ultimately contribute to strengthening both its social accreditation among citizens and to stimulate a political mandate among the electorate. Certainly, the instrumentalisation of savage emotions can be treated as an effective political social engineering, which was to pave the way to postponed election triumph.

### **SAVAGERY AND CONFRONTATIONAL EXTERIORIZATION**

In historiography, savagery has been understood and defined in many ways. On the one hand, the concept of “wildness” is synonymous with the state of nature, which for many thinkers was the antithesis of human civilization. Wildness was a sign of primitivism or barbarism, a sign of a world devoid of rationalism. On the other hand, “savage” means “other”. Other is an “stranger” who was not so much inferior or inhuman, but rather naive, simple, but to some extent noble, even pure. It is also someone who is too emotional and deviates from the applicable standards of the so-called modern world (among others Degérando, 1969; Diop 1991, Fernandez-Armesto, 2002; Morgan, 2003; Sarmiento 2003; Todorov, 2010; Fox 2011). A similar ambiguity can be found for the

concept of “wilderness”. Hence, wilderness was defined, among others as: the preservation of the world; a necessity for human life and condition; some idea, which: “may be understood as lying along a continuum where it is, on one end, little more than a romantic anachronism and, on the other, a category intrinsically bound up with the emergence of an evolutionary viewpoint on cosmological process” (Oelschlaeger, 1991, pp. 2-3, 281-354). At the same time, there are studies in which wildness is juxtaposed with the idea of *homo silvaticus* (a man going wild), where the threads of the actual decline of humanity, its morality and personal responsibility are raised. It is an argument that expresses a longing for metaphysics, for the heritage of the Judeo-Christian tradition. It contains a religiously motivated criticism of the comprehensive and multifactorial reduction of man to his biological and physicality (depersonalization), where both the negative effects of experiencing two totalitarianisms in the 20th century and the postmodern “decay” of the human condition are emphasized. Consequently, the behaviours and ways of thinking of individuals are a manifestation of wildness and their sources should be sought mainly in uncontrolled emotions or aroused urges, which are the only support for morality (Delsol, 2003, pp. 50-52).

Feminist and queer theories treat the category of wildness quite differently, where on the one hand wildness becomes a synonym of “refiguring the borders between nature and culture, and by extension between body and technology”, and on the other hand it is considered a key category thanks to which the existing patriarchal system can be deconstructed. In this sense “feral” serves to challenge the patriarchal domestication of gender and the homonormative taming of queer, where: “>>going feral<< emerges more as >>moving to a less tamed or untamed state after (failed) domestication<< than as returning to a wildness that is >>outside of power<<” (Yoon, 2017, p. 136). One might say that “feral” it is not so much a sign of a nonhuman animal, but rather of women who oppose domestic exploitation, male domination or are able to break radically from duplicating the imposed roles, functions, ideas, etc. In this sense “going feral” is an attempt to radically go beyond the patriarchal, omnipotent scheme—male control. This is the moment when the idea of wilderness is not so much an antithesis to civilization or a synonym for contemplating nature, but rather a manifestation of rebellion and resistance in the context of no alternative to patriarchal patterns and norms. I am talking here about the figure of a “wild woman”, which becomes a contradiction for the “domesticated woman” who, through radical—by assumption—impetuous, disorderly, uncompromising, etc.—opposition to male oppression and domination obtains both subjectivity and a sense of freedom and agency (Struthers Montford, Taylor, 2016, pp. 5-17; Donaldson, Kymlicka, 2011).

In a sense, an analogous affirmation of wildness, which may not contradict patriarchy and phallogocentrism, can be found in Nick Garisde’s argument. According to the author, being wild is not only a synonym of someone destructive or maladjusted, but manifestations of human savagery can be viewed as a new way or radical predisposition to question the democratic *status quo*. We are talking here about those citizens or social groups who are victims and / or experience negative effects of liberal democratic practices (e.g. alienation, commodification, poverty, exclusion, etc.). In this sense, feral citizens are not only a symbol of political activity or spontaneous mobilization,

but also a source of disturbances, rebellion, and resistance in the existing political space and conformistically repeated routines, ways of thinking or acting. In this way, they create a new spectrum of possibilities for conducting public debates, developing different sensibilities or strengthening pluralism in politics. At the same time, they stimulate the formation of social movements, especially those favouring the development of a green society that is environmentally and nature-friendly (Garside, 2013, pp. 45-54, 65-84).

The above example of definitions of savagery shows that it can be treated not only negatively, as something fundamentally bad (inhuman negative emotions) or some primitive state that testifies to dehumanization or constitutes species degradation (Nalaskowski, 2006, p. 56). Wildness can also be considered as a reactive emotion that becomes a source or a manifestation of radicalism, violence or agency unpredictable in its consequences. If we use the metaphor of a wall in the context of describing the existing concrete-political conditions, then crossing them, undermining or attempting to overcome them may be related to with violent emotional expression, which is a premise to challenge existing norms, applicable rules and social standards.

It is worth adding that wildness can be identified with the process of externalization under given conditions of a certain human productive energy, individual or collective activity or self-creation. It entails the mechanism of subjective externalization, where we are dealing with the embodiment of human dispositions, knowledge or skills, and more importantly with the external-practical effects of human mentality, actions or decisions (Cackowski, 1979, pp. 90-121). In this sense, the attack by Trump supporters on the Capitol, their public savagery, can be viewed as a manifestation of confrontational exteriorization. It is about the moment when, in the public space, we dealt with a collective and violent articulation of often antagonistic ways of thinking, reasons, opinions, goals, etc. elections by Trump. These were largely emotional conditioned responses that—as a rule—they were nonconformist and dissocialising. In other words, it is a situation where, in the practice of political mobilization, individuals and groups of people have temporarily (or permanently) lost internalized norms, values, rules or principles to openly—repeatedly demonstrative, even aggressive on a verbal and non-verbal level—to oppose and confront both with the practiced political culture (negation of principles, rules or procedures of the democratic and politically correct establishment, etc.) (Ziółkowski, 2013; Eatwell, Goodwin, 2018; Ziółkowski, 2019, pp. 72-110). It is both spontaneous (people spontaneously and instinctively were joining the protest-attack) and externally controllable (Trump, through his activity in social media and public statements, had a real impact on the emotional level of the crowd—its behaviour, reactions, distorted content, ways of articulation. dissatisfaction, etc.) the savagery of the former President's followers can also be seen as a real radicalisation of right-wing populism, where through the emotionally motivated behaviour and reactions of the broad masses of society, the political leader could—and partially did achieve—the intended political goals (forcing the public to acknowledge invalidity of elections and re-election).

In essence, it was about applying the sociotechnical mechanism of affective polarization to political competition, with the right-wing populist leader in the narra-

tive and political message transforms the political conflict and electoral competition into a literal and violent struggle at the junction of: own electorate (“We”) ↔ broadly understood enemies (“They”). It means the form of a Manichean project (a dualistic worldview that provides clear contrast conceptions between ‘the People’ and ‘the negative others’) and the demagogic construction of a scapegoat (liberal elites as the synonym of “the negative others” and the sources of whole he sources of whole evil in the American society), which additionally strengthened the “fanatical belief” in the leader, his “political messianism”, ie, spoken words, formulated message, presented worldview, observed behavior, decisions, etc. (Snow, Bernatzky, 2019, pp. 130-146). At the same time, this antagonisation gained strength and credibility thanks to and through the emotionalisation of the message, when Trump instrumentally used emotions during a protest-assault for political purposes (van Troost, van Stekelenburg, & Klandermans, 2013, pp. 186-203). Paradoxically, the furious, wild crowd of followers—the mythical people—was not at all free, fully conscious, independent or self-creative in its political agency and subjectivity, but to some extent became an emotional tool, a reified object, in the hands of its political “messiah.” In this sense, Mirosław Karwat is right, he emphasized:

The radicalization of the populist movement of protest, rebellion and change manifests itself in an obsession with settlements, passion of avengers and trackers, and at the same time—thus with the depersonalization and dehumanization of the attackers. Radical populism differs from the mature forms of subjectivity of people understood in any other way, that it is ruled by the psychology of the crowd, the masses rather than reflective consciousness, by emotional reflexes and the power of irrational prejudices, obsessions than self-control and subtlety of reasoning. (Karwat, 2017, pp. 26-27)

In other words, it can be concluded that, from the perspective of social engineering influences, the wild attack on the Capitol—more precisely, collective political savagery—was not so much an example of active collective primitivism, distortions and pathologies of human behaviour, or a fully conscious and controlled manifestation of dissocialisation and nonconformism in public space, but rather it was the result of a deliberate and planned social engineering strategy on the part of the right-wing populist, Donald Trump and his immediate political environment. A strategy which in this case was directly related to the emotional political mobilization of one’s own political base and broadly understood—outside and accidental—supporters.

## CONCLUSIONS

In summary, it can be said that the political leadership of Donald Trump, especially when viewed in the spirit of angry populism and through the prism of the events of January 6, 2021. in Washington, not only has shown and confirmed most of the conventional attributes of contemporary right-wing populism, but is also an important illustration of a certain theatricalisation and the radicalization of America’s populist leadership practices. In this perspective, Trump’s emotional social engineering

influences not only proved to be a very effective tool of political mobilization, but also showed a certain delusional spectacularity of this attack. Paradoxically, the wild crowd, which he “fed” on the images, delusions and resentments of his political messiah, was able to expose and undermine the “fragility” of democratic procedures, principles, and, consequently, an illustration of human anger, civic frustration and negation for the current political culture in America. Worse still, the wild assault on the Capitol will go down in history as a violent formula for political mobilization in right-wing populism, which, from the point of view of political social engineering, means at least three things: (1). The emotion of wildness and the state of savagery can be a planned and thoughtful form of individual and group expression in politics; (2). The violence of emotions, both positive and negative, strengthens—in the sense of effectiveness—populist emancipatory formulas, including collective confrontational externalisation; (3). Scheduled and implemented by the political leader, emotional confrontation with respect to the followers may result in direct violence, physical struggle and, which is even worse, loss of life for political reasons.

**FUNDING:** This research received no external funding.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## REFERENCES

- Alexander, J. C. (2011). *Performance and Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Barbalet, J. M. (1998). *Emotion, Social Theory, and Social Structure: A Macrosociological Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barbalet, J., M., & Demertzis, N. (2013). Collective Fear and Societal Change. In. N. Demertzis (Ed.), *Emotions in Politics. The Affect Dimension in Political Tension* (pp. 167-185). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Berezin, M. (2001). Emotions and Political Identity: Mobilizing Affection for the Polity. In. J. Goodwin, J. M. Jasper, F. Polletta (Eds.), *Passionate politics: emotions and social movements* (pp. 83-98). Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Brown, R., & Pehrson, S. (2020). *Group Processes. Dynamics within and Between Groups*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Cackowski, Z. (1979). *Człowiek jako podmiot działania praktycznego i poznawczego [Man as the subject of practical and cognitive activity]*. Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza.
- Canetti, E. (1978). *Crowds and Power*. New York: Continuum.
- Debord, G. (1992). *Society of The Spectacle*. London: Rebel Press.
- Fox, R. (2011). *The tribal imagination: civilization and the savage mind*. Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press.
- Degérando, J.-M. (1969). *The Observation of Savage People*. Berkeley: University of California Press.



- Delsol, Ch. (2003). *Esej o człowieku późnej nowoczesności* [An essay on a man of late modernity]. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak.
- Diop, C. A. (1991). *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology*. New York: Lawrence Hill Books.
- Donaldson, S., & Kymlicka, W. (2011). *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Eatwell, R., & Goodwin, M. (2018). *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy*. London: Penguin Books.
- Fernandez-Armesto, F. (2002). *Civilizations: Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature*. New York: A Touchstone Book.
- Garside, N. (2013). *Democratic Ideals and the Politicization of Nature: The Roving Life of a Feral Citizen*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Griffin, R. (2017). Interregnum or endgame? The radical right in the “post-fascist” era. In C. Mudde (Ed.), *The Populist Radical Right* (pp. 15-27). A reader. London & New York: Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1992). The Question of Cultural Identity. In S. Hall, D. Held, T. McGrew (Eds.), *Modernity and Its Futures* (pp. 273-325). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hall, S. (1997). The Work of Representation. In S. Hall (Ed.), *Representation* (15-75). London: Sage.
- Hall, S. (2019). Culture, the Media, and the “Ideological Effect”. In D. Morley (Ed.), *Essential Essays / Stuart Hall. Foundations of Cultural Studies. Vol. 1* (pp. 298-335). Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Haslam, S. A., Reicher, S. D., & Platow M. J. (2011). *The New Psychology of Leadership. Identity, Influence, and Power*. Hove & New York: Psychology Press.
- Hochschild, A., R. (1983). *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Hogg, M. A. (2001). Self-categorization and subjective uncertainty resolution: Cognitive and motivational facets of social identity and group membership. In J. P. Forgas, K. D. Williams, L. Wheeler (Eds.), *The Social Mind: Cognitive and Motivational Aspects of Interpersonal Behavior* (pp. 323-349). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hogg, M. A. (2006). Social Identity Theory of Leadership. In J. B. Ciulla, C. L. Hoyt, G. R. Goethals, D. R. Forsyth (Eds.), *Leadership at The Crossroads. Vol. 1. Leadership and Psychology* (pp. 62-77). Westport, Connecticut, London: Praeger Perspectives.
- Kassab, H. S. (2016). *The Power of Emotion in Politics, Philosophy, and Ideology*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 25-80.
- Keltner, D., & Gross, J. J. (1999). Functional Accounts of Emotions. *Cognition and Emotion*, 13(5), 467-480.
- Keltner, D., Oatley, K., & Jenkins, J. M. (2014). *Understanding Emotions*. Third Edition. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Clark, M. S., & Brissette, I. (2000). Relationship beliefs and emotion: Reciprocal effects. In N. H. Frijda, A. S. R. Manstead, S. Bem (Eds.), *Emotions and Beliefs. Feel-*

- ing Influence Thoughts* (pp. 212-240). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Czapów, C., & Podgórecki, A. (1972). Socjotechnika – podstawowe pojęcia i problemy [*Social engineering—basic concepts and problems*]. In A. Podgórecki (Ed.), *Socjotechnika. Style działania* [*Social engineering. Styles of action*] (pp. 9-35). Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza.
- Hatfield, E., Cacioppo, J. T., & Rapson, R. L. (1994). *Emotional Contagion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Karwat, M. (2003). Polityka jako festiwal hipokryzji [*Politics as a festival of hypocrisy*]. In B. Kaczmarek (Ed.), *Metafory polityki* [*Metaphors of politics*]. tom 2 (pp. 291-316). Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa.
- Karwat, M. (2017). Autorytaryzm a populizm. Zarys współzależności [*Authoritarianism and Populism. Morphology of Interdependence*]. In F. Pierzchalski, B. Rydliński (Eds.), *Autorytarny populizm w XXI wieku. Krytyczna rekonstrukcja* [*Authoritarian Populism in The 21st Century. Critical Reconstruction*] (pp. 15-32). Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa.
- Kertzer, D. I. (1988). *Ritual, Politics, and Power*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Kwiatkowski, S. (1974). *Słowo i emocje w propagandzie* [*Word and emotions in propaganda*]. Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, pp. 153-155.
- Pierzchalski, F. (2013). Performans somatyczny – ciało jako element aktywności politycznej [*Somatic performance – body as element of political activity*]. In M. Babecki, F. Pierzchalski (Eds.), *Transformacje rzeczywistości. Przejawy aktywizmu w kulturze, mediach i polityce* [*Reality transformations. Manifestations of activism in culture, media and politics*] (pp. 155-185). Kraków: Wydawnictwo Libron.
- Mayer, N. (2021). Political sciences approaches to the far right. In S. D. Ashe, J. Busher, G. Macklin, A. Winterpp (Eds.), *Researching the far right. Theory, Method and Practice* (pp. 17-31). London & New York: Routledge.
- Morgan, L. H. (2003). *Ancient Society*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press.
- Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist radical right parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, C. R. (Eds.). (2012). *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or corrective for democracy?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nalaskowski, A. (2006). *Dzikość i zdziczenie jako kontekst edukacji* [*Wildness and savagery as the context of education*]. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”.
- Niedenthal, P. M., & Ric, F. (2017). *Psychology of Emotion*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2019). *Cultural Backlash. Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Plamper, J. (2012). *The History of Emotions. An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Podgórecki, A. (1968). Pięć funkcji socjologii [*Five functions of sociology*]. In A. Podgórecki (Ed.), *Socjotechnika. Praktyczne zastosowania socjologii* [*Social engineering. Practical applications of social engineering*] (pp. 9-34). Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza.

- Rosanvallon, P. (2008). *Counter-Democracy. Politics in an Age of Distrust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sarmiento, D. F. (2003). *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Searle, J. R. (1998). *Mind, Language and Society. Philosophy in The Real World*. New York: Basic Book.
- Solomon, R. C. (2003). *What Is An Emotion? Classic and Contemporary Readings*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Struthers Montford, K., & Taylor, Ch. (2016). Feral Theory: Eiditor's Introduction. *Feral Feminisms*, 6(Fall), 5-17.
- Taylor, Ch. (2004). *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Todorov, T. (2010). *The Fear of Barbarians: Beyond the Clash of Civilizations*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Traverso, E. (2019). *The New Faces of Fascism. Populism and the Far Right*. London: Verso.
- Turner, J. C. (1985). Social categorization and the self-concept: A social cognitive theory of group behaviour. In E. J. Lawler (Ed.), *Advances in group processes: Theory and research*. vol. 2 (pp. 77-122). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Oelschlaeger, M. (1991). *Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Snow, D., A., & Bernatzky, C. (2019). The coterminous rise of right-wing populism and superfluous populations. In G. Fitzi, J. Mackert, B. S. Turner (Eds), *Populism and the Crisis of Democracy. Volume 1: Concepts and Theory* (pp. 130-146). London & New York: Routledge.
- Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2019). Shifting Emotional Regimes: Donald Trump's Angry Populism. In *Emotions, Media and Politics* (pp. 110-128). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press. Berezin, 2001, pp. 93-97
- van Troost, D., van Stekelenburg, J., & Klandermans, B. (2013). Emotions of Protest. In N. Demertzis (Ed.), *Emotions in Politics. The Affect Dimension in Political Tension* (pp. 186-203). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Yoon, H. (2017). Feral Biopolitics. *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 22(2), 135-150.
- Ziółkowski, J. (2013). *Wrogość w stosunkach politycznych. Modelowa analiza funkcjonalna [Hostility in political relations. Model functional analysis]*. Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa.
- Ziółkowski, J. (2019). *Syndrom oblężonej twierdzy [The syndrome of the besieged fortress]*. Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa.

---

**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

Filip Pierzchalski is an assistant professor with Ph.D. in political science at the University of Warsaw. His current research interests include political theory, political leadership, aesthetics and politics.

**OPEN ACCESS:** This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits any non-commercial use, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author(s) and source are credited.

**JOURNAL'S NOTE:** *Society Register* stands neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published figures, maps, pictures and institutional affiliations.

ARTICLE HISTORY: Received 2022-08-10 / Accepted 2022-11-15

