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How Tech Populism is Undermining Tech Policy Development

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About ITIF

Public policy think tank committed to pro-productivity, pro-innovation, and pro-technology policy agenda internationally, in Washington, and in U.S. states

Focusing on:

- Innovation processes, policy, and metrics
- Science policy related to economic growth
- IT and economic productivity
- Innovation and trade policy
- Clean energy and life sciences innovation
Tech Policy Used To Look Like This

The Promise of the Arts: A New Frame for Invention

Dr. Kathryn Graddy: Chair, Department of Economics, Brandeis University
Jeremy Nowak: President, William Penn Foundation
The Hon. Michael Nutter: Mayor, Philadelphia, PA
Emily Pilloton: Project Director, Studio H

Moderated by David Grant
Now It Looks Like This
Tech Populism Is Not New...

There is nothing so absurd that it cannot be believed as truth if repeated often enough.

William James
1842-1910
But Today It’s On Steroids
What Is Tech Populism?

- Marked by fear, misunderstanding, distrust
- Emotional, hyperbolic
- Self-interested
- Demonizing big business, big government elites
Internet Politics Typology

- **Cyber-Libertarians (CL)**: Emphasizes individual empowerment and societal benefit, advocating for minimal government intervention.
- **Social Engineers (SE)**: Focuses on government regulations and societal benefit, promoting structured and controlled environments.
- **Free Marketers (FM)**: Balances individual empowerment and government regulations, favoring market-driven solutions.
- **Moderates (M)**: Strives for a balance between societal benefit and government regulations, offering a moderate approach to policy and technology use.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TECH POPULISTS</th>
<th>TECH PROGRESSIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Are you motivated by...</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-interest</td>
<td>Societal benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you see problems as...</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Us versus them</td>
<td>Opportunities to work together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you believe government and businesses are...</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something to fear</td>
<td>Legitimate partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you prefer arguments that appeal to...</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td>Reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Are you focused on technological...</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downsides</td>
<td>Benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Is the legal system something you...</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distrust</td>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tech Populism Is Grounded In Self-Interest

- Not wanting to pay traffic tickets for running red light
- Getting cheaper phone without a contract & “breaking” my phone.
- Downloading content without paying
- Using web applications that hurt other broadband users
- Using free Internet resources sites without sharing my information
Tech Populism Demonizes the “We”
- Tech Populism Relies on Spin
- **Issue: Net Neutrality**

- **Populist solution:** Impose utility-style regulations to treat all bits equally

- **Progressive solution:** Allow network innovation while protecting consumers
Issue: Online Advertising

- **Populist solution**: Prevent companies from using customer information to target Internet ads

- **Progressive solution**: Allow use of customer information in well-functioning, self-regulatory environments
Issue: Digital Copyright

- **Populist solution:** Weaken protections for copyrighted material so content is free

- **Progressive solution:** Balance between Internet platform innovation and free speech with rights of copyright holders
Issue: Cell Phone Unlocking

- Populist Solution: Ban device locking
- Progressive Solution: Allow carriers to choose whether to lock; but require transparency
Issue: Educational Data

- **Populist solution**: Ban collection of data on individual students ("cognitive colonization")

- **Progressive solution**: Allow use of student data for analytics as long as it is de-identified.
Why the Rise of Tech Populism?

- Rise of overall populism
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- Web 2.0 enables campaigns
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THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION FOUNDATION
Why the Rise of Tech Populism?

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- A media with fewer resources and more desire for “eyeballs”
Where Are We Headed?

- Frenzied protests are the new norm
- Tech populism expands to more issues
- A general dumbing down of tech policy
How to Get Back On Track

- Expose tech populist demagogy
- Don’t overestimate tech populist political power.
- Embrace a progressive approach that expanding societal benefits and mitigates specific harms
Thank You

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