

MODERN POLITICAL ANOMIE

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

Modern Political Anomie

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Literature Review

I examine works by Emile Durkheim, primarily the book *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals* ([1957] 2001). To better situate his work, I draw upon several research articles by Stjepan Mestrovic on Durkheim's political anomie, *The Sociology of Emile Durkheim* by Robert Nisbet (1974), *Durkheim's Political Sociology* (1971) and *Durkheim on Politics and the State* (1986) by Anthony Giddens.

Thesis Statement

My research explores and operationalizes the political sociological theory of Emile Durkheim to demonstrate that political anomie has resurfaced in American society.

Theoretical Framework

According to Durkheim, democracy is not rule by the people, but effective communication between the State and the people, but the rule of the State must never be tyrannical. Political anomie occurs when the will of the people predominates and rules over the State. Durkheim links economic anomie with political anomie, in that all major social functions in society are made secondary to economic functions (Durkheim 1950 p. 16): This is problematic because the only rule in economics is that of self-interest, which is insufficient for morality, and

the consequences amount to “a public danger” (Durkheim 1957 p. 18). Durkheim describes democratic political systems that are ruled by the will of the people as “pseudo-democracies” characterized by chaos, stormy changes in politics, instability, even “evil”, because the will is inherently unstable (Durkheim 1957 pp. 95-100).

Project Description

In this study, symptoms of anomie are identified by relating sudden regime changes affecting world politics and periods of political turmoil within the US with indicators of suicide, xenophobia, conservative ideology, and the stripping of rights.

INTRODUCTION

Regardless of party affiliation and personal belief, the current political climate in the United States is tumultuous and chaotic. Though the studies are there, it doesn't take empirical analysis to understand and feel the effects of this political turmoil, individually and as a nation. US politics have become increasingly polarized: democrat and republican party affiliation have morphed in to liberal and conservative. Their respective ideologies no longer represent simple political ideals, but personal values inextricably linked with how people are navigating the social world. Perhaps most interesting is that members of both groups are experiencing this painful state of confusion, even those who voted for President Trump. The sociopolitical climate of the United States today is undoubtedly a social phenomenon, and should be studied as such by sociologists.

Given the increasing complexity and sheer size of our current society, sociology today mostly limits itself to micro-level analysis of macro-level events. However, given the unique nature of politics today, a study going beyond analysis of political trends and ideology is necessary to truly understand this sociopolitical climate. Because this political turmoil is so overwhelmingly tangible on both the individual and societal level, it seems especially useful to analyze the current sociopolitical climate as a phenomenon emerging from the objective reality of society while causing direct and measurable effects on the individual: this break down of social bonds between the individual and community is best explained as anomie. This is the framework of classical sociological theorist Emile Durkheim.

Despite his enduring prevalence in the canon of sociology, Durkheim's political theory has been frequently neglected and almost entirely ignored in studies of anomie. With the rise of

critical theory and postmodernism in sociology, the work of classical theorists such as Durkheim are neglected at best or incorrectly interpreted at worst. Many in sociology write Durkheim's political theory off as conservative and authoritarian, reading him from the perspective of "social control" or "social order", disregarding Durkheim's repeated emphasis on the importance of social justice (Mestrovic 1989). Ironically, some political revolutionaries managed to avoid the mistakes of the academy: Huey P. Newton, civil rights activist and co-founder of the Black Panther Party, directly credits Durkheim as influencing his philosophy in his book *Revolutionary Suicide* (pp. 3-4).

Additionally, Durkheim's conceptualization of anomie is often misattributed to the later work of Robert K. Merton. Anomie is most frequently understood as "normlessness", "normative confusion", "lawlessness" and "deregulation" in English, but these words obscure the meanings implied by the French words used by Durkheim and others to describe anomie as a concept. An analysis of Durkheim's writings in French reveals that he understood anomie as "derangement", not "deregulation", and he believed anomie to be a painful condition felt by individuals and society; anomie is an injustice, "a sacrilege against the dignity of a human person and the sacrosanct quality of truth" (Mestrovic & Brown 1985).

Anomie is a well-known concept in sociology and psychology. It was first used by Durkheim in 1893, in his doctoral dissertation and first work *The Division of Labour in Society*. He greatly expanded anomie as a concept in *Suicide*, the first study to analyze suicide as a social phenomenon. It is frequently studied in relation to deviance and suicide, but often as an individual state of mind: most interpretations and studies focus on anomie as an individual rejecting social norms, feeling alienated from society, experiencing a sense that life is meaningless, and a propensity to be self-interested. Though these methods of analysis are useful

in their respective fields, they often ignore anomie as a state of society affecting the individual, not simply individual outcomes resulting from isolated social factors.

Ali Teymoori and associates at Malardalen University in Sweden published recent studies in psychology attempting to create an appropriate measure of anomie as a collective phenomenon with individual-level outcomes. However, they argue that anomie should be measured solely as individual perceptions of social disintegration and how individual beliefs are shaped by the collective conscious, regardless of the objective condition of society (Teymoori 2015). From a Durkheimian perspective, this approach is insufficient because it ignores the existence of social facts and their *sui generis* nature: Durkheim believed society was more than the sum of its parts and had its own objective reality, and that social phenomena emerge from this reality outside the individuals that compose society (Durkheim 1995). In *Suicide*, Durkheim heavily criticizes Western economic practices for prioritizing the attainment of profit as the ultimate goal in life, instead of a means to an end so that the individual can live a happy life. He discusses these economic practices as creating anomie in the individual: “Yet these dispositions [toward anomie] are so inbred that society has grown to accept them and is accustomed to think them normal. It is everlastingly repeated that it is man’s nature to be eternally dissatisfied, constantly to advance, without relief or rest, toward an indefinite goal” (Durkheim [1897] 1951, p. 257). Thus, individuals can experience the painful state of anomie emerging from structural social conditions without being aware of it. Psychological studies relying on self-reported perceptions of anomie inaccurately gauge the potential impact of anomic conditions emerging from the social structure itself.

In her paper “Societies without citizens: The anomic impacts of labor market restructuring and the erosion of social rights in Europe,” Noelle Burgi discusses how modes of

government in Europe have created widespread anomie by coercively institutionalizing neoliberal economic practices: these new forms of domination utilize technologies of power to shift the responsibility of bringing about a new market utopia on to their citizens, “depriving social actors of agency and voice while submitting them to the imperative of actively participating in the construction of an ideal competition society” (Burgi 291). Free-market practices manifest in the work setting by prioritizing excellent performance and total quality, which prescribes subjectivity to workers by assigning them autonomy and responsibility in achieving their work tasks, but these prescriptions reference an ideal that is limitless and unachievable. Burgi analyzes macro-level systems of domination with micro-level workplace practices to conclude that “The country has been subjected to an avalanche of measures that are liquidating the right to have rights and institutionalizing a totally arbitrary normative order” (296). Anomie is expressed as social contempt and the denial of recognition, fear of loss of social position, rises in mortality rates from suicide, the brutalization of interpersonal relationships at work, the increase in psychological troubles, stark trends in surging unemployment and rising poverty. In a key part of her analysis, Burgi references Durkheim’s *Suicide* and how the relevance of his remarks on how the limitless nature of economic attainment as a direct cause of suicide cannot be overstressed. Though her theoretical framework excludes Durkheim’s political sociology, she supplements with other theorists to create a surprisingly similar framework as can be found in *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*. Burgi’s analysis of political anomie is the most comparable to the interpretive analysis of this paper.

In order to study anomie rigorously as a societal phenomenon, a relationship must be established between social contexts and individual outcomes on a much broader scale. Sociopolitical environment, cultural shifts, economic conditions, individual outcomes and

perceptions are all factors that can be used to measure anomie, and each of these must be considered based on the field of study. This particular paper seeks to identify political anomie as a measurable state of society by identifying conditions of political disarray in history and connecting those conditions with individual outcomes.

CHAPTER I

DURKHEIM'S POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

Emile Durkheim's theory must always be understood in context of his two main goals in sociology: the acceptance of sociology as a legitimate science, as made clear in *The Rules of the Sociological Method*, and "his quest for a science of morality" (Mestrovic 1989, p. 3). To understand Durkheim's political sociology, a few core concepts found throughout his work must be defined and explained within context.

In "The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions," Durkheim discusses duality as "the double existence we lead simultaneously: one purely individual, which has its roots in our organism, the other social, which is nothing except an extension of society." (Durkheim ([1914] 1973, p. 44) The individual himself is necessarily egoistic because he pursues his own ends to survive; he is the Freudian id, or the "lower" pole, because when he satisfies his desires it is he alone that he satisfies. The antagonism between the individual and society exists because "The interests of the whole are not necessarily those of the part; this is why society cannot form or maintain itself without requiring of us perpetual sacrifices that are costly to us. For the sole reason that it goes beyond us, it obliges us to go beyond ourselves; and to go beyond itself is.... something which does not happen without a more or less painful tension" (Durkheim [1914] 1973, p. 44). Moral activity is that which conforms to rules of conduct to pursue impersonal goals; morality begins with "attachment to something other than ourselves" (Durkheim [1914] 1973, p. 36). For Durkheim, individual morality restricts egoistic pursuits and causes the individual to look beyond himself. It is essential in the creation, maintenance, and endurance of any society.

Society is organized “so that the individual may realize himself more fully, and the management of the collective apparatus in a way that will bear less hard on the individual.... And the cooperation of all men of good will towards an ideal they share without any conflict” (Durkheim [1950] 1983, p. 71). Because man’s will is inherently egoistic and the maintenance of society requires painful sacrifices from the individual, the State is the “higher” pole of society, or the Freudian superego: it is the “organ of social thought” (Durkheim [1950] 1983, p. 79) whose “responsibility it is to work out certain representations which hold good for the collectivity” (Durkheim [1950] 1983, p. 50). As Durkheim succinctly states, “The fundamental duty of the State is laid down in this very fact: it is to persevere in calling the individual to a moral way of life.... If the cult of the human person is to be the only one destined to survive, as it seems, it must be observed by the State as by the individual equally” (Durkheim [1950] 1983, p. 69). Though the book was written years prior to the essays in *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, the continuity of Durkheim’s thought originates in *Suicide*. He writes:

“Men would never consent to restrict their desires if they felt justified in passing the assigned limit. But, for reasons given above, they cannot assign themselves this law of justice. So they must receive it from an authority which they respect, to which they yield spontaneously. Either directly and as a whole, or through the agency of one of its organs, society alone can play this moderating role; for it is the only moral power superior to the individual, the authority of which he accepts. It alone has the power necessary to stipulate law and to set the point beyond which passions must not go.” (Durkheim [1897] 1953, p. 249)

Legitimacy is an important and widely debated concept in political social theory, and Durkheim’s theory of the State does not neglect it. For Durkheim, patriotism is the collective

force that unites people under the nation and gives the State legitimacy in regulating societal morality.

“Now, patriotism is precisely the ideas and feelings as a whole which bind the individual to the State. If we suppose it to have weakened or to have ceased to exist, where is an individual to find this moral authority, whose curb is to this extent salutary? If there is no clearly defined society there with a consciousness of itself to remind him continually of his duties and to make him realize the need for rules, how should he be aware of all this?” (Durkheim [1950] 1983, p. 73)

He is very clear in his assertion that patriotism binds the individual to the State so that the individual will understand the need for rules and submit to moral authority. In *Germany Above All*, Durkheim makes his own views of legitimacy very clear in his criticisms of Treitschke’s view that coercion is the only necessary force of legitimacy. He writes:

“A nationality is a group of human beings, who for ethnic or perhaps merely for historical reasons desire to live under the same laws, and to form a single State, large or small, as it may be; and it is now a recognised principle among civilised peoples that, when this common desire has been persistently affirmed, it commands respect, and is indeed *the only solid basis of a State*. But this truth is made to appear a sentimental absurdity if we agree with Treitschke that a State may be consolidated by mere coercion, that the cordial consent of its citizens is unnecessary to it, and that its authority may be efficacious without their free consent.” (Durkheim 1915, p. 40).

Here, Durkheim goes so far as to identify consent of the people to be ruled by the State as “a recognized principle among civilized people”. Thus, the common desire of people to live under

one State and obey the same laws as a nationality gives the State a base legitimacy, and this legitimacy is maintained through collective sentiments of patriotism.

Though his position on patriotism as a force of legitimacy is clear, Durkheim's discussion of patriotism as it manifests in modern life is always very cautious and double-sided. In *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, Durkheim is slightly pessimistic but very realistic in his treatment of patriotism, noting that it mostly surfaces as powerful collective sentiments justifying actions of war and conquest: "True patriotism, it seems, is only exhibited in forms of collective action directed towards the world without; it seems to us as if we could only show loyalty to our own patriotic or national group at times when it is a strife with some other group." (Durkheim [1950] 1983c, p. 75). Nevertheless, Durkheim's overarching view of patriotism as a sentiment in modern society is far from pessimistic. In *Moral Education*, Durkheim delineates the two paths of patriotism and their implications very clearly:

[Patriotism] can take two very different forms. Insofar as it is centrifugal, so to speak, it points national activity outside its boundaries and prompts nations to encroach upon one another, to stress their incompatibilities. Then they are put in a situation of conflict and, at the same time, put national sentiment in conflict with commitments to mankind. Or, conversely, the sentiment of patriotism may be altogether internally oriented, fixing upon the tasks of the internal improvement of society. In this case, it prompts all nations that have achieved comparable moral development to collaborate toward the same end. The first way is aggressive, military; the second is scientific, artistic, and, in a word, basically pacific. (Durkheim [1961] 2010, p. 77).

Patriotism should inspire the pursuit of justice (tasks of internal improvement and moral development) instead of inspiring the State to engage in competitive domination at the detriment of other nations. In this same section of *Moral Education*, Durkheim explicitly states that the goal of the State should be “committing itself to an access of justice, to a higher morality, to organizing itself in such a way that there is always a closer correspondence between the merit of its citizens and their conditions of life with the end of reducing or preventing individual suffering” (Durkheim [1961] 2010, p. 77). For Durkheim, justice is the basis of social solidarity in modern societies because it mediates between collective representations and man’s narcissistic will (Mestrovic 1989, p. 4).

In *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, Durkheim argues “that no reform has greater urgency” than the need for regulation and ethical standards in business and industry: he discusses modern economic life as claiming a right to “moral anarchy,” making production the sole aim of society without any type of moral regulation (Durkheim [1950] 1983, p. 15). This continues his line of thought from *Suicide* (see Introduction), where he holds that unregulated economic activity negatively impacts the individual with or without their knowledge: “To pursue a goal which is by definition unattainable is to condemn oneself to a state of perpetual unhappiness” (p. 248). He argues redistributing the entire system of property ownership in society would do nothing to fix the anomic conditions resulting from completely unregulated business: “The state of anarchy would still persist; for, let me repeat, this state of anarchy comes about not from [the means of production] being in these hands and not those, but because the activity deriving from it is not regulated” (Durkheim [1950] 1983, p. 31). In this not so subtle critique of Marxism, Durkheim suggests that the cause of social ills such as wealth inequality are caused by

unregulated and unlimited economic activity that allows certain people to amass wealth with no limit, thus cannot be fixed by redistribution alone.

Political anomie is the reversal of homo duplex so that the “lower” pole, or the egoistic will of the people, predominates over the “higher” pole of the State to structure society’s rules (Mestrovic 1989, p. 8). When society fails to restrain the unlimited desires of man’s egoistic aims, they will become antisocial because “there is no form of social activity which can do without the appropriate moral discipline” (Durkheim [1950] 1983, p. 14). Durkheim describes democratic political systems that are ruled by the will of the people as “pseudo-democracies” characterized by chaos, stormy changes in politics, instability, even “evil,” because the will is inherently unstable (Durkheim [1950] 1983, pp. 95-100). Economic anomie is directly related to political anomie, because a politically anomic State fails to regulate the economic sector until “all major functions have been made secondary to economic functions” (Durkheim [1950] 1983, p. 15). Durkheim describes economic anomie as a lack of morality effecting the entire social body, amounting to anarchy, suffering, crises, and creating a public danger (Mestrovic 1989, p. 10).

In *Suicide*, Durkheim distinguishes anomic suicide as being a direct result of changes in the social order or from man’s activity being unregulated and unrestrained. He writes: “every disturbance of equilibrium, even though it achieves greater comfort and a heightening of general vitality, is an impulse to voluntary death. Whenever serious readjustments take place in the social order, whether or not due to a sudden growth or to an unexpected catastrophe, men are more inclined to self-destruction” (Durkheim [1897] 1953, p. 246).

Anomic suicide stands in contrast with egoistic and altruistic suicide, and much of his discussion of anomic suicide centers around economic crises causing spikes in suicide as a symptom of both economic and political anomie. Durkheim writes:

“Industry, instead of being still regulated as a means to an end transcending itself, has become the supreme end of individuals and societies alike. Thereupon the appetites thus excited have become freed of any limiting authority. By sanctifying them, so to speak, this apotheosis of well-being has placed them above all human law. Their restraint seems like a sort of sacrilege.” (Durkheim [1897] 1953, p. 255)

His line of thought continues in *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*. He writes: “It is a good thing for the society when the moral activity thus released becomes socialized, that is, regulated. If left entirely to individuals, it can only be chaotic and dissipated in conflicts: the society cannot be shaken by so much internal strife without injury” (Durkheim [1950] 1983, p. 24). In economic disasters, the injury that society is shaken by has consistently been suicide. Studies have shown correlations between spikes in suicide and economic downturn for years, but Durkheim reasons that the lowering of conditions in themselves is not simply responsible. Some of the most desolately poor societies have the lowest suicide rates. In our time, we have access to much improved statistics, and this phenomenon still proves to be true. Durkheim writes:

“What proves still more conclusively that economic distress does not have the aggravating influence often attributed to it, is that it tends rather to produce the opposite effect. There is very little suicide in Ireland, where the peasantry leads so wretched a life. Poverty-stricken Calabria has almost no suicides; Spain has a tenth as many as France. Poverty may even be

considered a protection. In the various French department the more people there are who have independent means, the more numerous are suicides” (Durkheim [1897] 1953, p. 245).

A very interesting example of this phenomenon is shown in a recent study of economic recession and suicide. One of the worst economic recessions in the world occurred in 2009 in the Baltic states (Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia). They experienced the highest decline of gross domestic product in the European Union, dramatic changes in salary policies, financing of healthcare, and unemployment rates skyrocketed. However, suicide rates in these regions experienced little to no change. Twenty years prior in the 1990’s, the Baltic states experienced a substantial increase in suicide coupled with economic hardships, but this period also saw drastic societal changes within that region: the collapse of communism and the restoration of independence from the Soviet Union within the region (Stankunas et al. 2013). This example aligns very well with Durkheim’s thought that disruptions in the social order correlate with spikes in suicide rates.

In summary, the State is the organ of social thought whose duty is to call the individual to a moral way of life. Its legitimacy as the regulating moral body is established and maintained through collective representations of patriotism, which have the potential to inspire innovation and societal progress leading to justice when directed inward, but creates conflict with other nations when directed outside the State’s borders. If justice is the goal set forth by society, then patriotism as a collective representation will help the individual control his narcissistic will to achieve social solidarity in the forms of progress and development.

Now that we fully understand Durkheim’s conception of the state as it should exist in a healthy society, we can identify the criteria for determining the pathological conditions of an

anomic society. Understanding that political anomie is the reversal of homo duplex so that man's egoistic will rules over society and structures its rules, we can easily see how justice and patriotism can be reversed so that man's egoistic pursuit of self-interest comes to dominate social life. In this study, the stripping of rights is an anomic condition because "the progress of justice is measured by the degree of respect accorded to the rights of the individual, because to be just is to grant everyone what he has the right to demand" (Giddens 1971, p. 49). Patriotism directed outward creates conflict in the individual trying to reconcile national sentiments with commitments to mankind, or not harming others. Xenophobia allows the individual to justify the State's aggressive rhetoric or treatment of a particular group, without having to conceive the moral violation of commitments to mankind. In any context, conservative ideology is a clinging to tradition and an unwillingness to change or further develop. Conservative ideology frequently inhibits the pursuit of justice in favor of clinging to tradition.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL DATA

This section analyzes suicide rates in the United States over time in the context of US and world political events, focusing on two periods where suicide rates change most drastically. The first period, 1920 to 1940, is referred to as the Great Depression period (Figure 1). The second period, 2000 to present day, is referred to as the Great Recession period (Figure 2).

The Great Depression Period

At the beginning of the first period, suicide rates spike from 1919 to 1921, from around 10 per 100,000 to about 12.5 per 100,000. After dipping slightly, suicide rates go from about 11 per 100,000 in 1923 to about 14 per 100,000 at the start of the Great Depression in 1929. Only one year later in 1930, rates increased to an alarming 16 per 100,000. By 1932, suicides reached historic highs by spiking to about 17.5 per 100,000. Suicides had declined by 1940 to about 14.5 per 100,000 before dropping to around 10 per 100,000 in 1943.

The US entered World War I in 1917 and participated until its' end in 1918. The period from 1917 to 1920 was marked by widespread xenophobia caused by the First Red Scare in 1917 and the Red Summer in 1919. The Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918 are representative of this widespread growing fear on a political level; The Wilson Administration imposed a significant limitation upon the right to freedom of speech with the Sedition Act by forbidding the "disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language against the United States during a time of war". Post-war inflation lead to the strikes of four million workers: These strikes were the Boston Police Strike, Seattle General Strike, Steel Strike of 1919, and Coal Strike of 1919. 1920 also saw the enactment of prohibition, a multitude of worker's strikes resulting in

deaths, and the ratification of the 19th amendment giving women the right to vote. Additionally, the US experienced a deflationary recession from 1920 to 1921. The Emergency Quota Act of 1921, also known as the Emergency Immigration Act, is considered the most important turning point in US immigration policy: It restricted immigration to 3% of foreign-born persons of each nationality that resided in the United States based on census data from 1910. It created the first of immigration quotas that were later known as the National Origins Formula. 1924 saw the US Immigration Act of 1924, which expanded the National Origins Formula and significantly reduced immigration yet again.

After the Wall Street Crash of 1929, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation was established to promote confidence in the country and help banks resume daily functioning during the Great Depression. It was an independent agency of the US Federal Government, but was fully owned and operated by the government as a lender. The Reconstruction Finance Corporation would continue under the New Deal until being disbanded in 1957. The Glass-Steagall Act of 1933 placed a “wall of separation” between commercial and investment banking: Securities firms and investment banks from taking deposits, and Commercial Federal Reserve member banks were limited from dealing in non-governmental securities for customers, underwriting or distributing non-governmental securities, and investing in non-investment grade securities for themselves. Much of these changes were repealed by Graham-Leachey-Bliley Act of 1999. Interestingly, Republican representative proposed to restore Glass-Steagall after the Great Recession of 2009, but House Democratic leaders refused.

The international rise of communism can be directly tied to fear and political unrest in the United States in the form of McCarthyism, or the practice of making accusations of treason without proper regard for evidence. Fascism and communism were climbing to a fever pitch in

Europe and Russia. In 1922, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics would become the world's first officially communist state, and Benito Mussolini gained dictatorial powers over Italy in 1925. In 1927, Joseph Stalin became the leader of the Soviet Union. After the Beer Hall Putsch, Hitler's failed coup of the Weimar Republic leading to his brief imprisonment, *Mein Kampf* was published in 1925. Aided by the Great Depression, the Nazi party increased its' share of the vote from 2.6% to 18.3% in 1930. Mao Zedong proclaimed the Chinese Soviet Republic in 1931, and Hitler became chancellor of Germany in 1933.

In the same year the US entered World War II after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, suicide rates decrease substantially and stay low throughout the war. Durkheim theorized that suicide rates decrease during times of war when nationalism rises to support the cause, because the sovereignty of the State is more important than the individual. Nationalism was intensely xenophobic during World War II. The House Committee on Un-American Activities, formed in 1938, conducted anti-Communist investigations that systematically stripped individuals of their rights. First Amendment rights to free speech were cast to the side and those who attempted to invoke their Fifth Amendment rights to avoid self-incrimination in these trials would oftentimes result in receiving the moniker "Fifth Amendment Communist" regardless of guilt.

The Great Recession Period

Suicide rates in 2000 were the lowest they had been since 1943 in the middle of World War II, at around 10.5 per 100,000. The age-adjusted suicide rate reported for 2016 was 13.42 per 100,000, which shows a steady and consistent increase in suicide during this period. An alarming trend from recent studies in suicide show that the greatest increase in suicide rates

occurred in females aged 10-14, and suicide is now the third leading cause of death in that age group. Suicide is the second leading cause of death in the 15-34 age group.

Multiple studies show that suicide rates during and following the Great Recession of 2008 more than quadrupled in the United States. Prior to the recession, suicide rates were at about 12 people per 100,000 per year, and after the recession, suicide rates rose to about 51 people per 100,000 per year (Reeves et al. 2012). This period is easily identified as a mixture of both economic and political anomie. The Great Recession was directly caused by the bursting of the housing bubble, the housing market correction, and the subprime mortgage crisis. In simple terms, housing prices fell extremely low but the market was booming because banks were giving loans to people who did not qualify in credit and did not feasibly have the ability to pay the loans back. Credit agencies were approving people who did not meet the standards to meet the supply and demand of the banks, which created the subprime mortgage crisis. The Great Recession occurred because banks and credit agencies were completely unregulated and doing unethical and illegal things to make as much profit as possible at the expense of an entire economy.

Furthermore, only one top banking executive was charged and jailed for the crimes that resulted in the Great Recession (Eisinger 2014). During periods of political and economic anomie, the government fails to regulate the business sector and becomes the “tool and servant” of economic life (Durkheim [1897] 1951, p. 283). Many banking executives were responsible for the illegal practices that caused an entire economic recession that caused thousands of people to fall in to poverty: not only did the government fail to hold all but one person accountable legally for the destruction caused by economic greed, but it is estimated that bail-out efforts totaled around \$5 trillion. The

social function of law and order was made secondary to restoring the economic function of banking.

Following the Great Recession, congress passed Dodd-Frank legislation: the goal was “To promote the financial stability of the United States by improving accountability and transparency in the financial system, to end "too big to fail", to protect the American taxpayer by ending bailouts, to protect consumers from abusive financial services practices, and for other purposes” (HR 4173). Dodd-Frank created the Consumer Federal Protection Bureau as an effort to better regulate the financial industry. Their jurisdiction includes banks, securities firms, foreclosure relief services, credit unions, payday lenders, debt collectors, mortgaging, and other financial companies.

In 2017, a majority Republican Congress passed the Financial CHOICE Act rolling back many Dodd-Frank protections. Orderly Liquidation Authority, which “allows the federal government to step in if a bank is near collapse to provide a backstop to ensure the institution's failure would not spread to the rest of financial system.” (Bryan) Here we see both the deregulation of the financial sector and the widespread adoption of conservative ideology. The stability and protection of the entire US financial system is at the whim of politicians, rather than true democracy of the people: “These surface changes mask a habitual stagnation. We must deplore the constant flux in political events and the all-powerful government offices with their inveterate clinging to tradition. They are a force against which we are powerless.” (Durkheim [1950] 1983c, p. 99)

CHAPTER III

MODERN REPRESENTATIONS OF POLITICAL ANOMIE

“And government, instead of regulating economic life, has become its tool and servant.” – Emile Durkheim

In this section, I will discuss examples of political anomie on the societal level resulting in the disintegration of social bonds and a severe loss of meaning for the individual. Regardless of ability to vote, many feel as though they have no power over what happens in this so-called democracy – An arbitrary normative order has developed from denying recognition of fundamental aspects of democratic citizenship. This anomie can be felt by the individual from perceived loss of the right to representation. I will discuss how economic anomie is easily observed in the corruption of political process resulting in a loss of faith for the individual, and give examples of xenophobic nationalism as a response to the disintegration of these social bonds.

The Corruption of Democracy

Lobbying exemplifies the rampant political anomie in US politics. Though the United States is a federal republic relying on representative democracy, the murky exchange of huge money between corporations and elected officials shows that the government has become the tool and servant of the economic sphere. Regardless of whether or not the individual citizen votes and performs their civic duty, they truly do not have a voice in the realm of politics because it is controlled by the neoliberal rules of the free-market, clearly demonstrated in the shady lobbying practices of US representatives. Political change is largely in control of those

who have the financial capital to lobby politicians, specifically corporations, business entities, or simply elite millionaires.

Lobbying is generally considered to be protected by the First Amendment right to petition the government. The purpose of lobbying is so that groups can communicate with government representatives regarding issues that taxpayers within their district are interested in. The Federalist Papers, written by founding fathers John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison, are considered to be the first act of “outside” lobbying. This stands in stark contrast with the corporate lobbying that characterizes today’s political climate.

Lobbying has undergone very limited and overall ineffective regulation over time. The Lobbying Registration Act of 1945 required domestic lobbyists, defined as anyone who is paid to spend at least half their time directly lobbying the federal government, to register and file quarterly reports with the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House of Representatives. In *United States v. Harriss*, the Supreme Court narrowed the scope of the 1946 Lobbying Registration Act so it covered only paid lobbyists meeting in person with legislators and stipulated that lobbyists must primarily be seeking to advance or defeat a particular bill in order for disclosure to be required under federal law. Lobbying disclosure law remained untouched until the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995, which clarifies ambiguous terms and quantifies the threshold for what defines lobbying activity. The Honest Leadership and Open Government Act (HLOGA) was passed in 2007 as an addendum to the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995. In addition to tightening rules on lobbying disclosure and filing, it lengthened the ban on post-employment lobbying for some government officials in an effort to put the brakes on this revolving door. The "Stop Trading on Congressional Knowledge Act of 2012," or STOCK Act, was signed into law in April, 2012, with the goal of clarifying the ambiguity of the legality of

trading on the knowledge gained during the course of official duties for members of Congress. However, President Obama signed Senate bill S.716 in 2013, which removed key transparency provisions of the STOCK Act, including the following requirements: personal financial disclosures of high level federal employees being made publicly accessible online, mandatory electronic filing of PFDs by the president, his cabinet and members of Congress, and the creation of a publicly accessible database.

The “revolving door” in lobbying refers to the tendency of government officials to become lobbyists and vice versa. In 2009, almost two thirds of all federal lobbying by dollar value involved a former congressional staffer or former member of Congress in some way. Eggers refers to the correlation between control of government and the partisan composition of lobbying done by former members and staffers as the “partisan revolving door,” which shows that interest groups hire lobbyists based on their political affiliation and the political party in power. He reports:

“Of all lobbying done by former members of Congress (shown with a solid line), just over 50% by value was done by Democrats in 2000, the last year of the Clinton administration. Just a year later, after President George W. Bush took power, that proportion had dropped to under 45%, on its way to a low just over 35% in 2005 and 2006. The proportion of lobbying done by Democrats then jumped after the Democratic electoral victories in both 2006 and 2008, with the Democratic proportion in the first year of the Obama administration exceeding that observed at the end of the Clinton administration”.

For former politicians, joining a government relations firm is a way to remain involved in policy decisions at a greatly increased salary. Lobbying is a \$3 billion industry, and lobbyists at top-

earning firms may earn 10 times the salary of a member of Congress. Of the 97 former members of the 112th Congress, 23 accepted lucrative new positions at lobbying firms within the first four months of being out of office, and 13 more were working at organizations that hire lobbyists.

The Honest Leadership and Open Government Act's post-employment ban prohibits all lobbying contact for a period of time between the former official and the agency or body he or she used to work for. The length of this 'cooling-off period' varies, depending where the revolvee previously worked and what position he or she held. The law distinguishes between members of Congress and staffers, and in the executive branch a distinction is made between "senior" and "very senior" officials. "Very senior" former executive branch officials and senators are prohibited from lobbying for a full two years, while House members, senior congressional staffers and "senior" Executive branch employees face a one-year ban. During this time frame, affected individuals may not engage in any communications aimed at influencing decision-making at their former agency or body. However, contact with the intent of sharing routine "administrative information" is not viewed as lobbying and is permitted by the law. In spite of these restrictions, many former members of Congress and top federal officials join lobbying firms during their "cooling-off" periods. Most of these revolvees will take the title of "senior advisor," or something similar, until they may legally lobby their old chamber on behalf of their clients. While such officials evidently bring value to their new employers in the influence industry, it's not always clear what sort of work they are doing in these roles. There is no registration or public disclosure required for simply working at a firm that lobbies, and as such the public may have little to no idea of what former politicians are doing behind the scenes. A senior advisor's work could be anything from recruiting new clients to the firm -- as Rep. Connie Mack IV (R-Fla.) was doing at Liberty Partners Group after he lost his 2012 re-election bid -- to

pushing the envelope when it comes to what constitutes communication "with intent to influence." For example, in response to a question about how the lobbying communications ban would affect his work at law and lobbying firm Covington & Burling, Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.), who retired at the end of 2012, stated that while he couldn't lobby current members of the Senate, he is "not prohibited from giving them [his] best advice."¹

In studying the complex relationship between money and politics, several types of anomalies emerge and are tracked: lawmakers receiving more than 50% of their itemized contributions from out of state, lawmakers receiving twice as much in contributions from their top donors as their next highest donors, lawmakers sponsoring legislation that was lobbied by only one company or other organization whose employees or PAC also donated to the sponsoring lawmakers, lawmakers receiving twice as much in contributions from their top donors as their next highest donors, lawmakers receiving twice as much in contributions from their top donor industries as their next highest donor industries, more than 50% of a committee or candidate's spending being paid to a single vendor, and PACs giving at least \$7500 to a candidate's Leadership PAC but nothing to the candidate's committee. Though these anomalies alone cannot predict political corruption, they are often made possible through practices allowing political officials to fly under the radar while engaging in corruption across political party lines.

Top campaign fundraisers, commonly known as "bundlers," have had a growing role contributing generous rewards in presidential and congressional campaigns over the past decade. However, there are no laws requiring disclosure of campaign bundlers, as long as the fundraisers are not currently active, federally registered lobbyists. Beyond that, bundler disclosure is entirely voluntary. Mitt Romney's 2012 campaign refused to disclose its full list of bundlers, despite the

¹ Information from OpenSecrets.org, website for the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan research group that tracks money in US politics.

fact that all other major presidential candidates have done so dating back to the 2004 election. Public pressure, was not enough to get Romney's campaign to follow the bundler disclosure precedent – Not even a 23,000-signature petition organized by pro-transparency groups. When campaigns do agree to voluntarily disclose top fundraisers, there is still plenty of leeway for hiding important names or information. For example, the Obama campaign released a list of "volunteer fundraisers" less frequently than the monthly requirement for campaigns to release information about their lobbyist bundlers (on a quarterly basis). They created their own definition of a "volunteer fundraiser," including celebrities George Clooney and Sarah Jessica Parker raising millions by promising to have dinner with a certain number of people who donated to Obama, except their names are suspiciously not found on the list: this equates to millions of unreported dollars. In addition, the amount each bundler is credited with raising is given as a range: "\$250,000-\$500,000" or "\$500,000+.", thus bundlers who donate millions are again completely undocumented. There is no way to cross-check bundler lists for omissions and no consequences if certain individuals are not disclosed.

Bundlers are increasingly important to campaigns, and it's the FEC's duty to keep up with the changing face of campaign finance. The amount raised by bundlers for winning presidential candidates has grown: In 2000, it was at least \$55.8 million; in 2004, at least \$79 million; in 2008, a minimum of \$76.25 million; and in 2012, the floor was \$186.5 million. Additionally, there has been a heightened rate of return for those who bundle. According to Public Citizen, during his eight years in office, George W. Bush appointed about 200 bundlers to posts in his administration. An iWatch News investigation uncovered that President Obama had already appointed 184 bundlers to his administration in his first term alone. Nearly 80% of those collecting more than \$500,000 for the Obama campaign took "key administration posts" as

defined by the White House. Similarly, the Center has identified 35 of Obama's ambassador-level appointments as former bundlers for his campaign. The ambassadorships to France, the United Kingdom, and the European Union all went to campaign bundlers.

Dark money is a new trend emerging from politically active nonprofit groups that collects large contributions without disclosing the names of donors, such as Americans for Prosperity on the right and Patriot Majority on the left. Nonprofits are prohibited from using the majority of their resources for political purposes, but many come close to the line or cross it. These practices are made possible by two key Supreme Court cases. In 2007, *Wisconsin Right to Life v. FEC* allowed nonprofit 501(c) organizations to make "issue ads", using funds directly from their treasury, mentioning a candidate in the weeks immediately before an election or a political convention, as long as voters are not coerced to cast their ballots a certain way. Following this development, nondisclosed spending hit a record \$78.8 million in the 2008 election. The other case was 2010's *Citizens United v. FEC*, which made it possible for corporations, unions, nonprofit "social welfare" organizations and trade associations to directly spend their treasury funds on advocacy expressly calling for the election or defeat of a candidate; these advertising techniques and campaign strategies are labelled "independent expenditures." The result has been an upsurge in political spending by nonprofit 501(c)(4) "social welfare" organizations, which are overseen by the IRS instead of the FEC. These groups can't have politics as their "primary purpose," but that leaves them free to spend 49% of their funds on political activity, including advertisements.

The reason nonprofits are so popular for political spending is that they don't have to disclose their donors, because the IRS' mandate is more about privacy than it is about disclosure. And that has given the lie to the Supreme Court's 8-1 affirmation of transparency, contained in

the very Citizens United decision that loosened the spending reins: "[T]ransparency enables the electorate to make informed decisions and give proper weight to different speakers and messages," the opinion read, going on to say that "[w]ith the advent of the Internet, prompt disclosure of expenditures can provide shareholders and citizens with the information needed to hold corporations and elected officials accountable for their positions." However, dark money has done the opposite. In 2010, Aetna made public pronouncements showing support for President Obama's health care agenda, but it was later discovered that Aetna contributed millions to two dark money organizations (the Chamber of Commerce and American Action Network) that engaged in a costly and sustained attack on the changes to the system that later became parts of the Affordable Care Act. Many politically active nonprofits claim to be fulfilling their "social welfare" mandate by passing large amounts of money to each other in coordinated political efforts. For example, a \$4 million donation to Americans for Tax Reform from Crossroads GPS, a group co-founded by Republican operative Karl Rove, which ran ads coming to more than \$4.2 million in 2010. Critics say it's difficult to understand how these actions constitute a public benefit.

The lack of specific information that groups disclose on their IRS tax returns is a huge barrier to citizens and watchdogs checking the activities of politically active nonprofits. No detailed breakdown is required when groups report spending on things like "issue advocacy," "grassroots issue advocacy," "media production/buys" or whatever general category they invent that could contain political spending. Furthermore, these "social welfare" groups sometimes report different numbers to the IRS and FEC: American Action Network told the FEC it spent \$19 million on political communications 2010, but reported less than \$5 million in spending on politics to the IRS in that same year.

While FEC rules continue to mandate disclosure of a super PAC's donors, the reality is that shell organizations can effectively obscure the real identities of donors and make it impossible to follow the political money trail by shady tactics, such as carefully scrubbing incorporation documents. For example, in the 45 days before the 2012 election, the super PAC FreedomWorks for America began reporting donations from a corporation called Specialty Group, Inc. In total, the corporation gave more than \$10.5 million to the group between October 1st and November 1st, but virtually no information on the corporation could be found. Tennessee Secretary of State records showed that Specialty Group, Inc. was registered by an attorney using his home address as the corporation's official address, and had been formed only weeks before it began making donations. This attorney, who also is responsible for another “corporation” that made multimillion dollar donations to FreedomWorks for America, was unwilling to speak publicly about the corporation or where the money came from. Media investigations indicated the lawyer may have organized the corporations on behalf of others, possibly violating campaign finance laws, and complaints against his shell corporations were filed with the FEC in a pending case. At least three shell corporations made \$1 million in donations to Restore Our Future, the super PAC backing 2012 GOP presidential nominee Mitt Romney. After it was discovered that F8 LLC, Eli Publishing, W. Spann LLC all appeared to be paper entities with no employees or office space, the true donor stepped forward voluntarily. ²

These examples demonstrate not only the sheer scope of corruption in politics, but how widely accepted these practices are across the political spectrum. Elected representatives and politicians are not holding themselves accountable in their commitment to public service,

² Information taken from opensecrets.org, specifically the lobbying page, 10 things they don't want you to know page, and the political spending anomaly tracker.

refusing transparency to their constituents, and even violating the standards of law and regulation in favor of financial gain and re-election.

Xenophobic Nationalism

“Populism” is a buzzword frequently used by the media, academia, and even politicians themselves to describe political movements in the Western world: Many consider the ‘Brexit’ Referendum and the election of President Donald Trump to be populist phenomena. Both events were portrayed as extremely unlikely and unfavorable by respectable social institutions such as the media and public leaders, however, both events came to fruition by gaining the popular vote using xenophobic nationalist rhetoric. Burgi discusses how reactions at the individual level are observable in the sociopolitical culture of Europe, which exhibits a growing xenophobia that is often dismissed as simply populism instead of identified as anomie. Her observations are confirmed more recently in a 2017 study by the European Policy Information Center, Heinö et al. report that around one fifth of European voters, or 55.8 million people, choose authoritarian populist parties across the political spectrum³. She writes: “The rising support garnered by xenophobic and fascist forces reflects the need of social subjects to belong to a meaningful community protecting them against the destructive forces of the market and to re-appropriate agency in the face of impersonal governance at distance” (p. 292).

President Trump’s campaign rested largely on his xenophobic platforms blaming immigrants for many socioeconomic problems, culminated in his proposal to build a wall on the

³ From the 2017 European Policy Center report: “The term authoritarian populism is used as a collective word for the parties that challenge the so-called European consensus that has dominated the continent’s politics since the end of World War II. Although anti-establishment parties vary greatly from each other, the study groups together these different political forces by focusing on the significant overlap in their voter base: 1) the self-image that they are in conflict with a corrupt and crony elite; 2) a lack of patience with the rule of law; 3) a demand for direct democracy; 4) the pursuit of a more powerful state through police and military on the right and nationalisation of banks and big corporations on the left; 5) highly critical of the EU, immigration, globalisation, free trade and NATO; 6) the use of revolutionary language and promises of dramatic change”.

Mexican-American border. Shortly after being elected to the highest office in the United States, President Trump instituted a travel ban restricting certain countries from travelling to the United States, claiming his action was to ensure the safety of our country from terrorists while auditing the current system of vetting immigrants. However, none of the countries in his travel ban were the home countries of those who committed former terrorist attacks. The election of President Trump coincided with the emergence of white nationalist groups organizing public demonstrations around the country, an alarming occurrence that had not been seen on such a scale since the Civil Rights movement. President Trump himself has significant ties to white nationalist/populist figures. Steve Bannon, former White House chief strategist and owner of Breitbart news (an alt-right media platform), considers himself the vanguard of global populism (Clark). President Trump failed to condemn white nationalist groups responsible for terroristic acts several times during press conferences.⁴

Both Brexit and the election of President Trump represent dissonance between a large body of people and the social institutions they embody. The media, public officials, leaders, and many more were completely ignorant to the growing sentiment of their people. Unfortunately, the use of xenophobic rhetoric to pacify fear resulting from economic loss is nothing new. It hardly needs to be said that some of the greatest genocidal atrocities in mankind's history were made possible using such rhetorical strategies. This is why the rise of xenophobic nationalism is so obviously a condition of political anomie

⁴ References common knowledge and popular news throughout the Trump campaign and presidency. These events are thoroughly documented by Ben Mathis-Lilley in the *Slate* article "How Trump Has Cultivated the White Supremacist Alt-Right for Years".

CONCLUSION

This study is an interpretive analysis of political anomie using Durkheim's original theoretical framework. As such, an abundance of examples and modern representations could readily fit within this framework to identify the conditions of political anomie, both in the United States and beyond. Identifying other aspects of political process that demonstrate a disintegration of social bonds for both the individual and social institutions. Though Durkheim's theory was sufficient for my purposes, his theoretical framework could easily be adjusted and supplemented with additional theorists to study political anomie across a broad range of sociopolitical contexts in many different nations.

Some may view the use of primarily one classical theorist as a limitation to this research, especially given the drastic changes in the thrust of sociology since Durkheim's time. However, the theory of Durkheim is particularly advantageous to understanding the many forms and conditions of anomie because his theory focuses on what the ideal society should look like, as opposed to critical theory, which identifies problems without ever denoting the conditions of a healthy society. Considering the exponential growth of technological advances in every sphere of social life, the world is drastically increasing in perplexity every year. Perhaps it may become easier for sociologists to focus on the ideal conditions for societal stability, rather than the problems emerging from social relations in varying environments.

Though Durkheim's political theory has been long neglected, it is my hope this paper may shed some light on the great potential of political anomie as a useful tool and lense for understanding the complexity of common experience arising from political interactions. Future

research may include developing criteria for engaging in studies of political anomie from individual outcomes to political occurrences and broader social phenomena.

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APPENDIX



Source: Time Series Data Library

Figure 1. US Suicide Rates 1920-1969, per 100,000.

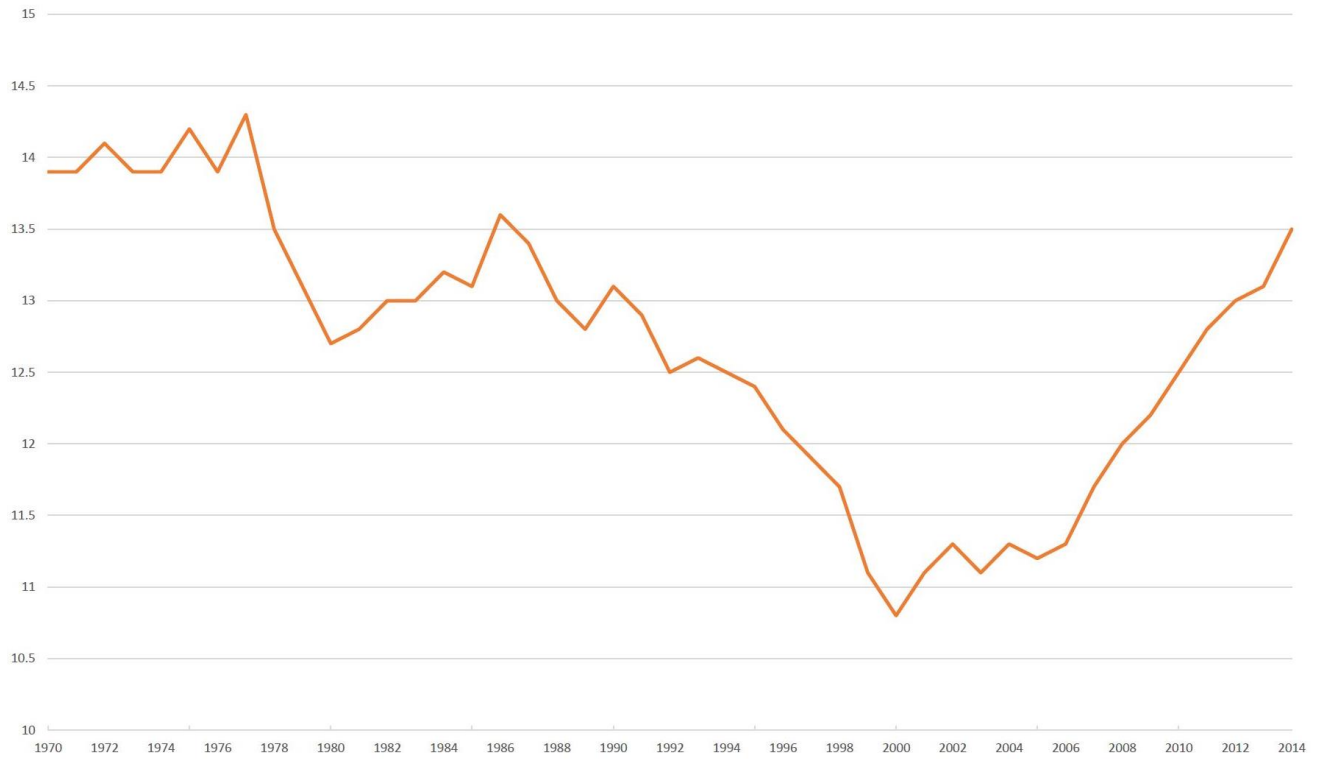


Figure 2. US Suicide Rates 1970-2014, per 100,000. Source: OECD.