How Techno-Populism Is Undermining Innovation

WiFi Network: ITIC-Guest
Password: Welcome2ITI

Join The Conversation: #TechPopulism
@RobAtkinsonITIF | @GrantGross | @Larry_Irving | Elliot Maxwell | Bruce Mehlman
April 1, 2015

How Tech Populism is Undermining Innovation

Rob Atkinson, President, ITIF

@robatkinsonitif
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
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
- A Better Alternative: Tech Progressivism

- More rational—proposals based on facts and logic

- Supports the right rules for innovation; trusts the system to enforce those rules

- Embraces technology innovation

- Recognizes vital roles of industry and government
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TECH POPULISTS</th>
<th>TECH PROGRESSIVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you motivated by...</td>
<td>Societal benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-interest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you see problems as...</td>
<td>Opportunities to work together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Us versus them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe government and businesses are...</td>
<td>Legitimate partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something to fear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you prefer arguments that appeal to...</td>
<td>Reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you focused on technological...</td>
<td>Benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downsides</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the legal system something you...</td>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distrust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tech Populism Is Grounded In Self-Interest

- Running red lights without getting tickets
- Getting cheaper phone without a contract & “breaking” my phone
- Downloading content without paying
- Using web applications that hurt other broadband users
- Using web sites without sharing my information
Tech Progressivism Balances “Me” and “We”

- Using technology to make intersections safer
- Getting discounted phones
- Compensating creators
- We want broadband to work well for most people
- We want a vibrant Internet ecosystem that balances revenue with privacy
▪ Tech Populism Demonizes the “We”
- Tech Populism Respects the “We”
Tech Populism Relies on Spin
Tech Progressivism Relies on Analysis

Designed for Change:
End-to-End Arguments, Internet Innovation, and the Net Neutrality Debate

Richard Bennett

Information Technology and Innovation Foundation
- **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: Connected Cars, VMT, and Usage-Based Insurance

- Populist solution: Ban the technology

- Progressive solution: Maximize the benefits while baking in consumer privacy
Issue: Commercial Drones

- **Populist solution:** Create a preemptive privacy regime to limit drone innovation

- **Progressive solution:** Flexible rules to ensure public safety and protect privacy while enabling innovation
Issue: Robots

- **Populist solution:** Demonize robots as job killers
- **Progressive solution:** Accelerate robot use to raise productivity, while helping displaced workers
**Issue: Traffic Cameras**

- **Populist solution:** Ban or make them less effective
- **Progressive solution:** Widespread deployment of cameras with limitations to prevent tax or privacy abuse
Issue: Cell Phone Unlocking

- **Populist Solution**: Ban device locking
- **Progressive Solution**: Allow carriers to choose whether to lock; but require transparency
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 demagoguery
- Don’t overestimate tech populist political power.
- Lead the charge toward innovation; don’t bow to pressures of digital mobs
- Embrace a progressive approach that expanding societal benefits and mitigates specific harms
If Only…

CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE!
Thank You

Rob Atkinson
ratkinson@itif.org

Follow ITIF:

Twitter: @robatkinsonitif
Facebook: facebook.com/innovationpolicy
Blog: www.innovationpolicy.org
Website: www.itif.org
How Techno-Populism Is Undermining Innovation

WiFi Network: ITIC-Guest
Password: Welcome2ITI

Join The Conversation: #TechPopulism
@RobAtkinsonITIF | @GrantGross | @Larry_Irving | Elliot Maxwell | Bruce Mehlman