

- **Prof. Andrés Rodríguez-Pose, Department of Geography and Environment, London School of Economics**
- **Golfing with Trump. The revenge of the places that don't matter.**
- **25.02.2021, 11:30-13:00**

In 2000 Robert Putnam forecast that United States (US) democracy was at risk from the twin challenges of declining civic engagement and rising interpersonal inequality. Sixteen years later, his predictions were vindicated by the election of Donald Trump as president of the US. This presentation will analyse the extent to which the 2016 election of Donald Trump —and his failed re-election bid in 2020— have been related to levels of social capital and interpersonal inequalities. We posit an alternative: that the rise in vote for Trump has been the result of long-term economic and population decline in areas with strong social capital. This hypothesis is confirmed by the econometric analysis conducted for US counties. Long-term declines in employment and population —rather than in earnings, salaries, or wages— in places with relatively strong social capital propelled Donald Trump to the presidency and almost secured his re-election. By contrast, low social capital and high interpersonal inequality were not connected to a surge in support for Trump. These results are robust to the introduction of control variables and different inequality measures. The analysis also shows that the discontent at the base of the Trump margin is not just a consequence of the 2008 crisis but had been brewing for a long time. Places in the US that remained cohesive but witnessed an enduring decline are no longer bowling alone, they have golfed with Trump and will, in all likelihood, continue to golf with Trumpism or other forms of populism.