

Of Price, Populism and Politics. Also, Pearls and Pants.

By VANESSA FRIEDMAN MARCH 16, 2017



Ivanka Trump arriving in West Palm Beach, Fla., with her husband and three children. Stephen Crowley/The New York Times

It's been a complicated week for politicians and luxury fashion, on both sides of the Atlantic.

First, François Fillon, the embattled conservative candidate for president of France, currently lagging in third place and charged on Tuesday with [embezzlement](#), was accused by [Le Journal du Dimanche](#) of having received “presents” from an unidentified friend in the form of 13,000 euros (about \$13,880) in custom suiting from Arnys, the tailor that LVMH [acquired](#) in 2012 to merge with Berluti, its men's wear label. Cue multiple headlines along the lines of [this one](#) from [ledauphine.com](#): “The very expensive clothes of François Fillon.”

Then it transpired that [Ivanka Trump's fine jewelry](#) line was no more, having been, depending on how you look at it, either shut down or transformed into [Ivanka Trump Fashion Jewelry](#) (i.e., no longer involving precious gems and metals, created with a different licensor, and instead of costing \$428 to \$47,000, costing \$28 to \$198).

Both of these developments underscore an unavoidable reality about life in the public eye: With populism on the rise, what politicians and their families wear (or put their name on) increasingly has a dollar, or euro, sign attached. And therein problems may lie. Price sensitivity isn't limited simply to objects on shelves in stores; it now goes with wardrobes, too. Better take it ... well, into account.

Ms. Trump apparently did. After all, though the general attitude toward any Trump-related product these days is to treat sales as a referendum on the president and whether people are buying the lines he (and his family) are selling, note that, according to a statement from the brand's president, Abigail Klem, the decision to discontinue the fine jewelry had nothing to do with revenue generation, but rather was made "as part of our company's commitment to offering solution-oriented products at accessible price points." In other words, to make the jewelry consistent with the rest of the brand's positioning.

The question being: Which brand?

Because, according to a company spokeswoman, this decision was actually made back in December. That is, after Ms. Trump had separated her personal social media accounts from her brand's social accounts, but before she had taken a [formal leave](#) of absence from the company. Which is interesting. Because segueing away from high-end jewelry doesn't just bring the collection in line with the rest of the Ivanka Trump product portfolio — the clothes and bags and shoes — it brings it in line with what is increasingly emerging as the Ivanka Trump personal portfolio: the issues of child care, working parents and sacrifices made.

Rhodium plate is consistent with her message in a way that diamonds and 24-karat gold would not have been. This was probably first brought home to Ms. Trump during the [outcry](#) over her appearance on “60 Minutes” in a \$10,800 bracelet from her own line, one her company subsequently marketed (oops). Then there was the social media [controversy](#) over her appearance in January in a \$4,990 silver Carolina Herrera evening dress just after her father’s [travel ban](#) on immigrants and citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries went into effect.

Mr. Fillon, on the other hand, has something of the opposite problem: His gift suits are consistent with a message; it’s just the wrong one.

Mr. Fillon was voted 15th of the [20 best-dressed men in France](#) last year by French GQ, and is known for his penchant for [red socks](#) from Gammarelli, the Italian company that also makes socks for the Vatican. So the fact that he would wear very expensive suits is not a surprise. (Besides, Le Corbusier wore Arnys, too; François Mitterrand used to wear its hats.) The problem is that he would get someone else to pay for them, especially when he is in the midst of pushing an austerity plan.



François Fillon, the beleaguered French presidential candidate. Eric Feferberg/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Taken together with current [allegations](#) that he enriched family members by employing them in nonexistent jobs, the clothing freebies underscore the perception that he is elitist and corrupt. His response to the revelations — in an [interview](#) published on Monday in the newspaper *Les Echos*, he effectively said “so what?” — did not help. (Arnys had no comment on the situation.)

Meanwhile, Mr. Fillon’s closest competitor, the independent candidate Emmanuel Macron, now believed to be the front-runner, is known for wearing suits by [Jonas et Cie](#), a favorite of many local diplomats, which sell

for €340 to €380 (\$363 to \$406). This is a choice he made after formerly wearing custom suits from Lagonda, which retail from €800 to €1,200 (\$854 to \$1,281), during his earlier career as an investment banker — a canny exchange probably based more on constituency than aesthetics. (Note: [He still came in 20th](#) on GQ's best-dressed list.)

Historically, we want our elected officials and their families, especially the families who are most often photographed next to them, to represent their countries as elegantly and admirably as possible, while at the same time representing the electorate as genuinely as possible. And these two imperatives often come into conflict, especially as the factions they serve grow further and further apart.

While this has been an issue in the past (see Nancy Reagan and the scandal of her request for free suits when she was first lady and, at the opposite extreme, the complaints when Rosalynn Carter, during the 1970s recession, recycled her old dresses; also the hoo-ha around Sarah Palin's campaign wardrobe), it has never been quite as microscopically chronicled, as undeniable or as generally accessible as it is today.

Want to know how much your leader's clothes cost? Look it up on Google. Budget negotiations may never be quite the same.