

A stylized world map composed of a grid of dots in various shades of gray, with several dots highlighted in red. The map is centered behind the title text.

Right-Wing Populism and Authoritarian Nationalism in the U.S. and Europe

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- Despite recent setbacks, right-wing populism continues to challenge liberal democracies. It can be read as a revolt of those who consider themselves losers of, or feel threatened by, socially unregulated globalization and/or cultural modernization. A common denominator of support for right-wing populism and authoritarian nationalism is a pessimistic outlook on life, which is exacerbated by the politics of fear and anger promoted by right-wing populist leaders, including the »othering« of ethnic minorities.
- Political and business elites have for decades let neoliberal globalization go on socially unregulated, to the benefit of the few and the detriment of the many. Right-wing populists promise economic and social protections against economic processes, namely trade and immigration, and a return to the cultural dominance of the ethnic majorities of the respective countries. Pro-globalization elites have not yet found ways to deal with people's anger with liberalization and with the resentment many feel concerning certain aspects of cultural change.
- Economic globalization has produced winners and losers. National strategies cannot remedy this situation, neither the pro-globalization attempt to improve competitiveness nor the protectionism embraced by most right-wing populists. The former continues the ongoing »race to the bottom« of lower corporate taxes, wages and standards (that cannot be ameliorated by national welfare policies as those are costs for governments and business). The latter is likely to lead to a global economic crisis. In order to prevent further revolt and backlash, global rules to socially regulate the global economy (including migration) are needed. Governments should strive for mutual assurances not to lower taxes and standards to increase competitiveness.



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1. Introduction: What are the Root Causes of Right-wing Populism and Authoritarian Nationalism?

Marine Le Pen decisively lost France's presidential election; Geert Wilders lost big in the Netherlands; the AfD in Germany has been losing ground; Trump, the populists' shining star, looks – well, not exactly more presidential, but more like a regular (if clueless) politician, his constant tweeting notwithstanding. Is populism on the run? Not so fast. The EU has narrowly escaped a knock-out blow, but none of the issues that have given rise to right-wing populism and authoritarian nationalism have been resolved: Anger about neoliberal globalization's obvious injustices has not dissipated. When Le Pen and Macron visited a factory in Amiens, where 286 workers will lose their jobs in 2018 when the factory is scheduled to be relocated to Poland, Le Pen delivered the Trump-like simple (and misleading) »solution« to a cheering crowd: When I am president, none of these jobs will leave France. The liberal Macron gave a more nuanced, balanced speech; he was booed at first.

It seems as though the pro-EU, pro-globalization elites have not yet figured out a way to deal with people's anger about globalization and cultural changes. On the contrary, politicians in the EU continue to use Brussels as a punching ball to deflect criticism of their own policies. Like prime minister Mark Rutte in the Netherlands, they also cater at least somewhat to the right-wing populists' xenophobia and islamophobia to win elections. To make matters worse, there is no majority at the supra-national level to address any of the problems underlying people's anger and fears. This might leave governments with no other option than to respond to nationalist and protectionist measures (such as tariffs, massive corporate tax cuts, lower social and environmental regulations etc.) in kind. Trade wars and the undercutting of standards in the interest of competitiveness might lead us exactly to the kind of competitive nationalism that the populists desire. Worse yet, if anti-immigration and anti-immigrant legislation is passed, these nation-states might end up being more and more ethnically defined, with or without populists in government.

What are the main problems at the heart of the current wave of right-wing populism and authoritarian nationalism in Europe and North America? First, let us briefly define the two phenomena and their

mutual relationship. The main narrative of populism is a juxtaposition of »the people« – understood as a homogenous entity, represented if not embodied by the populist party or leader – and an elite, establishment or ruling class, considered corrupt. Right-wing populism adds a second, horizontal juxtaposition to this vertical »us vs. them« by lashing out against minorities not considered to be part of »the people.« As populism often employs a particular style of political communication, namely constant provocations and tactical use of language, often without any basis in reality, and as it is often flexible concerning its programmatic vision, it is often considered to be a mere political strategy or style. However, while populism is indeed not a coherent political ideology, it is a very particular style of politics that is intricately related to particular political ideologies. In the case of right-wing populism, authoritarian and/or illiberal nationalism is often revealed as the ideological core when populists are elected to power.

While there are always national-specific reasons for the rise, and level of success, of right-wing populism and authoritarian nationalism, I argue that it can be read as a revolt of those who consider themselves losers of, or feel threatened by, socially unregulated globalization (trade, capital flows, offshoring, financialization, immigration) and/or cultural modernization (feminism, ethnic/cultural/sexual diversity, political correctness). Many voters revolt against the political and economic elites who have for decades succumbed to the neoliberal consensus of non-regulation and low taxation, perpetuated by so called experts who, however, failed to anticipate any of the ensuing economic crises. This is not to say that the explanation is a simple matter of economic determinism. Empirical research shows that supporters of right-wing populism are not necessarily among the most economically deprived. Moreover, even for those who have lost hope in the reform of mainstream political parties, there are alternatives to the support of right-wing populism and authoritarian nationalism: To a lower degree and in fewer countries, there also is a left-wing populist revolt against the economic elites benefitting from the status quo of non-regulation and low taxation.

Public opinion research shows that a crucial common denominator of the support for right-wing populism and authoritarian nationalism is a pessimistic outlook on life. This pessimism is exacerbated by the politics of fear and anger promoted by leaders of right-wing populist parties



and movements, resulting in a vicious cycle. Certainly, it has not helped that the elites have often shown little more than condescension towards those opposed to, and/or uncomfortable with, processes of globalization and cultural modernization. Right-wing populist leaders who claim to speak for »the people« do not just mobilize against supposedly corrupt political elites but also promote »othering,« i.e., the blaming of ethnic minorities, which often turns hateful and sometimes violent.

Arguably, the dual strategy of juxtaposing »the people« against elites and minorities by stoking fear and anger works best in political cultures with traditions of apocalyptic thinking and widespread use of conspiracy theories. Thus, dystopian thinking by public intellectuals and the spread of conspiracy theories in popular culture can be considered to feed a culture of pessimism and to potentially facilitate the promotion of fear.

2. A Comparative Overview: (Where) Will the Center Hold?

Right-wing populists are not necessarily extremists, and extremists are not necessarily populists. However, the more ethno-centric the conception of the people, the more xenophobic the positioning against »the other,« and the clearer the desire to overthrow liberalism, pluralism, and the democratic system of governance, the more likely it is that a right-wing populist party is also extremist. While so far, no fascist or national-socialist government has been elected, or taken power, in Europe or North America, the following (incomplete) overview shows that right-wing populists in government tend to embrace the ideology of authoritarian or illiberal nationalism, and that right-wing populists in opposition show a great deal of admiration for this ideology and these governments.

In Russia, while there are specific reasons for Putin's hold on power, including national security considerations, his authoritarian nationalism clearly has fascist tendencies. Democratic institutions, the institutions of the legal state, and the media are under almost full control of the government. Opposition figures are frequently imprisoned and violently assaulted. At the same time, it is puzzling that Putin continues to jeopardize the economic basis of his power, and that he is using a strategy of massive

disinformation to try to turn Western democracies into more nationalistic states. He considers liberal societies to be weak, which should serve his purposes (weakening the EU, of course, does make sense for him). His strategy appears to have backfired in the case of Donald Trump.

After the controversial referendum confirming an expanded role for the Presidency, Turkey seems well on its way to become an authoritarian state. Democratic and legal institutions, and the media, have been significantly weakened; opposition forces have been purged from the state and frequently imprisoned. Political violence is on the rise. At the same time, the country is torn between its links to the West (the basis of its economic success and its security, as part of the NATO) and the Islamic world, and in consequence bitterly divided. As of now, the Western-oriented, more liberal segment of the population, concentrated in cities and on the coast, and the Kurdish minority, which is under severe pressure from the government, together make up roughly half of the population. The right-ward shift of Turkish politics is likely to continue as liberals are marginalized and imprisoned, or decide to leave the country.

Bitter divisions also characterize Poland and Hungary, where the current governments have embraced authoritarian nationalism, have weakened democratic and legal institutions and the media, despite the fact that they only have the support of roughly half of the population and that the economic basis of their countries' success hinges on the membership in the European Union (which may have come too early after the end of Soviet domination). Despite widespread wariness of Russia, right-wing populists came to power with a combination of a promise of socialist-era social protection against the negative aspects of globalization, and a promise to restore national cultural identity in the face of allegedly unwanted modernization and foreign influences. Condescension of liberal elites has played a significant role.

In the United States (more detailed under point 3) the population is bitterly divided as well, not just along urban-rural but also along racial and ethnic lines. In the country's two-party system, much of Donald Trump's support was based on traditional partisanship. He won, however, not only because of the anachronistic institution of the electoral college (once designed to prevent populists from winning) but also because of working class support



in key states. This support, in turn, was based on Trump's promise – similar to that of Viktor Orbán in Hungary and Jarosław Kaczyński in Poland – to provide remedies to the double menace of economic globalization and cultural modernization. Trump promised jobs and dignity to a disaffected (white) working class that felt it had been abandoned by the political establishment of both parties. At the same time, Trump's hyper-version of the traditional nativism and coded racism of the Republican Party also attracted enough support from white supremacists to compensate votes lost to the Libertarian Party and others. Currently, the Trump administration seems torn between the »economic nationalism« and white identity politics of advisor Steve Bannon and the more traditional pro-business, low-tax Republicanism of the »globalists« around his son-in-law Jared Kushner. Trump himself, however, regularly performs much like a populist on the campaign trail, to the delight of his core supporters, who have apparently foregone all rational assessment of his actual performance and seem to blindly follow their leader, making Trump's a case of what Max Weber called »caesarism«.

In some countries, namely France and Austria, we might be witnessing the breakdown of the traditional party system. In France (more detailed under point 4), the »undemonized« Front National (FN) now has a solid working-class base and is a serious contender in the upcoming parliamentary elections, again based on the promise to provide protection against neoliberal globalization and cultural change (namely Muslim immigration). A »Republican coalition« might be able to keep the Front National and Marine Le Pen at bay for now, like in the presidential election of May 2017, but there is serious disenchantment with neoliberal globalization and the European Union (in its current form anyway) on the left of the political spectrum as well. In Austria, the situation is similar. The FPÖ (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs) has a solid working-class base and is a serious contender in elections and for governing coalitions, while the two major parties seem weary after a long period of grand coalitions. The FPÖ's electoral promise is like the Front National's.

In most other countries, right-wing populists are in a more or less marginal opposition and/or protest role, however, their presence and constant provocations regularly have significant impacts on government policy and societal discourse, shifting them to the right. In the UK, UKIP's

role in the decision to leave the European Union is a case in point (with the Brexit accomplished, its job is done, and it might simply disappear), as is the anti-Islam and anti-immigrant rhetoric of Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte during the campaign, responding to the threat of right-wing populist Geert Wilders. In Italy, Beppe Grillo's 5 Star Movement profits from the disenchantment of Italians with the whole political establishment. The partial co-optation of right-wing populist messages feeds off, and feeds into, the rising anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment, with grave consequences on mainstream politics and societal discourse almost all over Europe and even in Canada, where anti-immigrant violence has occurred despite the absence of a right-wing populist party and in the context of immigration and integration policies widely considered to be successful. Groups like La Meute in Quebec are aggressively opposed to the »accommodation« of immigrants' cultural and religious concerns. This might remind us of the German debate of a »Leitkultur,« where it is not considered sufficient that immigrants learn the language and respect the law but desired that they also adapt to particular cultural traditions (shaking hands, for example). In Germany (more detailed under point 5), the right-wing populist party AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) rose as a response to the Euro-crisis and then to the influx of large numbers of Muslim refugees. The AfD was elected to several state parliaments but as both the Euro-crisis and the influx of immigrants seem under control (for now), its electoral success has waned, and there are signs that it will simply self-destruct through infighting and incompetence, like its right-wing populist predecessors (DVP and Die Republikaner). A significant difference between the AfD and the Front National, the FPÖ, and the »economic nationalism« of Steve Bannon is that the AfD, for the moment, largely embraces economic globalization and neoliberal economic and social policies, a reflection of Germany's role in the world economy and its middle-class base.

In some countries, right-wing populism has not taken hold, namely in Spain, Portugal, and Greece, which is surprising given the fact that those countries (plus Italy) bear the brunt of the refugee crisis (perhaps it is due to the relatively recent experience with fascism). While there are right-wing extremist parties such as Golden Dawn in Greece, left-wing economic populism, also skeptical of the EU and neoliberal globalization, is dominant in politics and societal discourse. Thus, there is a danger



that liberal democracies are crushed between the right-wing and left-wing critiques of globalization.

One significant puzzle across Western Europe and North America is the fascination of right-wing populists with Russia and its president Vladimir Putin. While his autocratic style and Russia's authoritarian nationalism are an obvious draw, the significant security threat (which has Eastern European populists wary) that Russia poses should be equally obvious to someone with a nationalist agenda. In addition to the effects of Russian propaganda and dis-information campaigns and its alleged cyber-attacks, the reason for this embrace might be traditional anti-Americanism and widespread anti-liberalism among right-wing populists.

Across the spectrum, right-wing populists are largely opposed to immigration and specifically to Muslim immigration. For them, immigration is not simply a question of increased economic competition for non- and semi-skilled workers from their base, but a threat to the presumed (constructed) identity of »the people« and their traditional values. Similarly, most populists favor instruments of direct democracy, as this is the most direct expression of majority will. This preference is shared by many across the political spectrum because of the outsized power of political and economic elites, and unelected experts. It is important to note, however, that democracies have explicitly created institutions to prevent the »tyranny of the majority« for a reason: When populists reclaim the power of the alleged »silent majority,« this often means power for the biggest group in society (at times ethnically defined) to the detriment of minorities. Institutional protections of minorities are a key element of the legal state, and they must include high thresholds for referenda and other measures of direct democracy, if only to prevent that »hyper-democracies« abolish these institutions based on a »politics of fear and anger.«

In sum, political and business elites have for decades let neoliberal globalization (and other economic and technological processes) go on socially unregulated, to the benefit of the few and the detriment of the many. Left-of-center parties have largely failed to cushion this development at the national level; on the contrary, taxes for the rich have been lowered and consequently welfare policies have been cut. At the same time, in the face of liberal value changes, many conservative parties

have moved to the center culturally, leaving part of their traditional base politically lost. While not all right-wing populist and authoritarian parties fit the following description, I believe they are essentially making a unique offer (or are in the process of changing so that they can make this offer, e.g. the AfD in Germany): They promise economic and social protections against economic processes, namely globalization and immigration, and they promise a return to the cultural dominance of the ethnic majorities of the respective countries (and specifically the male and heterosexual parts of these majorities). Left-of-center parties can only offer the first element (and are currently not fully credible because of their neoliberal policies of the last decades). Conservative parties can only offer the latter element (and many are not fully credible because of their recent move to the center on social and cultural issues).

3. Authoritarian Nationalism in the United States? The Jury is Still Out

Trump clearly ran a right-wing populist campaign, lashing out against elites and minorities with constant provocations, which got him significant free media coverage. While he lost the popular vote by almost three million (which he continues to blame, without any evidence, on massive voter fraud), he won the electoral college in part because, in the context of a two-party system with high partisan polarization, most traditional Republicans pragmatically voted for him despite the misgivings many had: For them, he was »the lesser of two evils.« Many voters just wanted to »shake things up« by voting for someone from outside the political establishment.

Contrary to claims that Trump somehow »hijacked« the Republican Party, I argue that the Republican party has for decades more or less embraced tenets of the »us versus them« narrative. Trump simply used the traditional Republican playbook to the extreme, dividing the population along racial, ethnic, religious, gender, and urban/rural lines – as well as exploiting the anti-elite and anti-intellectual sentiment of the American body politic. This earned him the support of the right-wing extremists of the Alt-Right movement. He also received considerable support from the white working class, i.e. Americans without a college education, surprisingly also including white working class women (despite Trump's



obvious misogyny). As these working-class voters – previously either non-voting or marginally part of the Democratic coalition – put Trump over the top in several »battleground states,« specifically in the so-called rust-belt states (the old industrial heartland), it is plausible to call them the key group for Trump's success and to specifically ask why they supported him.

The aforementioned rust-belt states such as Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Pennsylvania used to be characterized by good-paying, unionized factory jobs that would allow even non- or semi-skilled workers a decent middle-class life, with health care and good retirement benefits. One could say they embodied the »American Dream.« Globalization has hit these states especially hard, as factories either moved to states in the South and West of the US, where unions are weaker, or abroad. Former factory workers then often had to compete with recent immigrants, and with women entering the workforce, some of them in order to make up for the lower income of their partners, for low-paying, non-union service jobs, without health care. Both Republican and Democratic administrations have for decades adopted policies such as socially unregulated free trade that have made the life of the working class in these states and elsewhere increasingly difficult. In 2016, it was the Democrats who were punished for these policies at the polls.

While the Democratic coalition has been glued together by a hodge-podge of identity policies (something for the Afro-Americans, the Latinos, the LBTGQ community, the environmentalists etc.), it has stood on the foundation of the core of the New Deal coalition, unionized workers, which between the 1930s and 1960s made possible the rudimentary US welfare state. Industrial workers especially are concerned about trade. Hillary Clinton, however, was not credible when she started being critical of free trade, namely TPP (the Trans-Pacific Partnership, recently scrapped by president Trump), because she had supported trade as first lady, senator, and Secretary of State. For many working-class Americans, she embodied the »out-of-touch elite« from »inside the beltway,« and she made matters worse by speaking condescendingly of them as »deplorable.« This was the kind of condescension working-class Americans are used to: »Just pay better attention in school and you will be fit for this modern and global world.« Bernie Sanders' left-wing variant of the popular revolt against the neoliberal consensus, without attacks against ethnic minorities and instead focusing

on the super-rich and (big) business, might have made a difference in the rust-belt, but alas, it was Donald Trump who was able to crack the Democratic base in the (white) working class. Minority voters largely stuck with the Democrats because of Trump's anti-immigrant messages and traditional GOP race politics (attractive for white-identity voters), but Clinton was not able to mobilize them in sufficient numbers. Where Pat Buchanan and Ross Perot had failed to win over Democrats with a populist anti-free trade message in the 1990s, Trump succeeded.

At the same time, this was not a case of simple economic determinism. Obviously, in the US, race and ethnicity always play a role. Research has shown that a key common denominator of voting conservative and right-wing populist is a general pessimistic outlook on life. Thus, the roles of political culture (e.g., anti-establishment, anti-state, anti-intellectualism), religion (e.g., evangelical visions of the apocalypse) and popular culture should not be underestimated. US popular culture is obsessed with dystopian, post-apocalyptic narratives and conspiracy theories (Steve Bannon's favorite book is »The Fourth Turning,« a history of the US that warns that »Winter is Coming«). So-called »preppers« prepare for the end of the world as we know it: Survival kits can be ordered online and seminars are on offer to learn how to survive after the apocalypse.

Pessimism makes people susceptible to fear, and the voters who made a difference in the Electoral College were mobilized by a politics of fear of globalization and of cultural modernization. They revolted against the increased competition for people ill-prepared for these developments and faced with condescension from the elites. Trump certainly knows how to talk to these voters, and they do not mind his crude language and empty promises, largely unrelated to any realistic policy, or even to any reality at all. In fact, it seems as though Trump merely uses words tactically, to achieve short-term objectives, and here the objective was to win the election. Will president Trump in fact do anything for the working-class voters in the rust-belt states and beyond?

Research on populism shows that participation in government tends to prevent right-wing populists from using their narrative of a political elite governing the country against the political will of the people, and of themselves as political outsiders speaking for a



»silent majority.« Despite his nomination of a cabinet of billionaires and generals, i.e. members of the elite, this has not been the case for president Trump, as he continues to lash out against the presumed »enemy of the American people,« namely the mainstream media, which he calls »fake news,« cleverly turning their criticism of his own questionable sources (Fox News, Breitbart) against them. Trump has also criticized the courts, which have repeatedly blocked his executive orders on banning travel from majority-Muslim countries, but he has so far refrained from simply ignoring them. Perhaps he hopes that with the successful nomination of Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court the judicial tide will turn in his favor.

When judging Trump's performance in office so far, it has to be acknowledged that the US has had a dysfunctional government for some time, characterized by hyper-partisanship and the inability to compromise. The Republican Party in Congress is bitterly divided between a handful of moderates, the establishment Republicans and the Freedom Caucus, consisting of Tea Party and other »movement conservatives,« elected with a mandate to never compromise. But clearly, Trump is far off the mark concerning his campaign promises, and he is rightfully criticized for proposing, or supporting, legislation that is contrary to these promises (as is the case for GOP efforts to »repeal and replace« Obamacare). Many proposed or enacted policies are simply off-the-shelf Republican mainstays: reduce regulation and lower taxes, while disregarding the negative social and fiscal consequences, including the negative consequences for Trump's own base.

Has Trump delivered at all? In terms of immigration, the effects of his actions have been largely indirect. There are significantly fewer illegal border crossings, in part because of a freer hand for the border patrols but mostly because of the changed political climate. Fear among undocumented immigrants probably has prevented some of them to compete for jobs. And there are significantly fewer visitors from the Muslim world despite the failure Trump's executive orders. Of course, at the same time, there are significantly fewer visitors in general, a burden for tourism and for business.

In terms of trade policy, it certainly seemed early on that Trump would deliver on his promise to use protectionism to bring back factory jobs to the US (as tenuous as this claim is). He derailed the trade agreement TPP, lashed out against Mexico, Canada and Germany for their trade

surpluses with the US, and against China for alleged currency manipulation. The US was hurting, he said, and this was going to change. Until, of course, Trump found that he needed China to deal with North Korea, and until the »globalists« in the White House, namely his son-in-law Jared Kushner and Gary Cohn, director of the National Economic Council, moved to marginalize chief strategist Steve Bannon and his »economic nationalism.« Trade, it turns out, is as complex as health care policy and foreign policy, which Trump is figuring out little by little between his trips to the golf course. In other words, parts of his base will lose because of unavoidable trade-offs in policy-making – the reality of which is a far cry from the »easy solutions« Trump the candidate had promised. In sum, the expectations of the losers of globalization and modernization are largely contradictory to the Republican mainstream and especially to the preferences of the business wing of the party. This has put the Republican coalition under immense pressure, and the jury is still out whether »economic nationalism« will prevail.

For now, the same is true regarding the question of whether Trump's right-wing populism has turned into authoritarianism, even though the dismissal of FBI director James Comey – thereby blatantly interfering with the investigation into the possible collusion of the Trump campaign and the Russian government – certainly points in this direction. Still, those who talk about »American fascism« are mostly exaggerating for political reasons, but I would argue that elements of Caesarism are noticeable. When Trump hits roadblocks in governing, he frequently returns to his base for reassurance. His core followers seem to have abandoned all effort at rational evaluation of the president's actual performance, they follow their charismatic leader blindly, without question. Let us hope that Trump never tests how far his followers (most of them heavily armed, many of them in the armed services and the police force) are willing to go if he clashes with democratic institutions, the courts, or the media.

4. France: A Country on the Brink

France is as divided politically as the US and neoliberal globalization plays as big a role as in the US rustbelt states. While the country's multiparty system gives voters more choice, especially those on the left that are concerned about neoliberal globalization but do not embrace anti-immigrant and Islamophobic positions, the



system of voting (two rounds in single-member districts, the second being a runoff election between the two top candidates from the first round) has shown that the right-wing Front National has become a serious contender. This often makes »Republican coalitions« of conservatives and socialists necessary to defeat FN candidates in the runoff election, as was the case in the second round of the presidential election in May 2017.

The Front National now has a working-class base and Marine Le Pen, chairwomen and daughter of the party's founder (who she expelled from the party because his extremism and anti-Semitism got in the way of her successful attempt to »un-demonize« the FN), has become the champion of many voters who are concerned about economic globalization and immigration. Like in the US rustbelt states, many people have lost their well-paying factory jobs due to global competition and the re-location of factories, often to other EU countries (where investors then often collected EU subsidies for »creating« jobs, in part financed with the taxes of those who lost their jobs in the process). Like in the US, these voters are angry about the condescension with which they are treated by the country's elites, thought to be out-of-touch and largely self-serving. Emmanuel Macron, the new president and leader of the movement *En marche!* (renamed *La République en Marche* after his victory) is part of this elite, which disqualifies him in the eyes of many. Unlike in the US, race does not play a decisive role in French politics. The Front National's base includes older immigrants of many backgrounds. Religion is a key factor, however, as the FN has traded its rabid anti-Semitism of the past for an equally rabid Islamophobia (including conspiracy theories such as the alleged plot of »le grand remplacement,« a conscious plan to replace the French population with Muslim immigrants). For all its »un-demonization,« the FN thus remains very much an extremist party. At the same time, the FN offers a combination of policies that no other party can fully match: Social protection vis-à-vis economic globalization (partially offered by the socialists and the left, but discredited because of neoliberal policies when in government) plus protection against cultural change (offered by the conservatives, but discredited because of their own cultural »modernization«).

During their only televised debate ahead of the second round on May 3, 2017, Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron went head to head on these issues.

Le Pen was especially aggressive and called Macron, a former investment banker and economics minister under president Hollande, »the candidate of savage globalization,« of »Uberization,« and of »social brutality,« among other things. She accused him of promoting complete submission of France to big business, banks, and Germany. Perhaps not coincidentally, the term »submission« is also the title of a recent novel by Michel Houellebecq, envisioning France as a Muslim country. Macron held his own, but not only did he have a harder time defending the benefits of an open global and European economy, for many workers he does embody the policy of »there is no alternative« to adapting to global competition by cutting the welfare state, lowering corporate taxes etc. While he claims to be neither left nor right, it can be no surprise that voters disenchanted with neoliberal globalization are flocking to the FN, perhaps not expecting much more than to »shake things up«. Finding a balance between the desire for economic security and the requirements of competitiveness, as he sees them, will be an enormous challenge for the new president, who will probably have to find changing majorities in the parliament.

5. Germany: Inoculated No More?

After consecutive successful performances in state elections, resulting in seats in twelve state parliaments, the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) will in all likelihood win enough votes in September of 2017 to also be represented in the German federal parliament, the Bundestag. Polls show, however, that support for the right-wing populist party, founded in 2013 as a response to the Euro-crisis, has significantly waned and is now clearly under 10% nationwide, down from over 20% in some state elections and as high as 14% nationwide. Support is higher in East Germany and especially in areas of high unemployment but while the party has moved from its initial Euro-skepticism to embracing anti-immigration and Islamophobic positions, it has confirmed its general pro-market positions by nominating Alice Weidel, an advocate of neoliberalism, as one of two lead candidates for the federal elections. This position is a reflection of Germany's role in the world economy and the fact that the AfD's base is not (yet) as heavily working-class as the Front National's or the FPÖ's in Austria. Weidel is a lesbian and some observers have described her nomination as hypocrisy, by others as a



sign of a certain acceptance of cultural change. The ticket is balanced with Alexander Gauland, a representative of the national-conservative wing of the AfD, widely thought to want Germany to return to how it was in the 1950s, not a hospitable decade for homosexuals. The obvious tension between the two candidates, however, is not the most serious one in the party. The AfD also has not been able to, or not wanted to, distance itself from right-wing extremist ideologues and operators.

For a long time, Germany seemed to be inoculated against successful right-wing extremism because of the crimes of National Socialism and the conservative party's ability to integrate national conservatives. When right-wing populist parties capitalized on protest votes and entered state parliaments, the combination of their constant infighting and obvious incompetence usually limited their presence to one term. For some time, it seemed as though the AfD would be able to largely escape this fate. Under the leadership of Frauke Petry (who is currently being marginalized because of attempts to distance the party from the extreme right), the AfD has not only increased its right-wing populist message, adopting much of the language of »anti-establishment,« »anti-Islam,« anti-media and anti-immigration, but it has also significantly professionalized its performance (in part with the help of funds allegedly coming from Switzerland).

While Germany might have to brace itself for a permanent presence of right-wing populists, there are some hopeful signs: 1) as of now, no other political party is willing to enter into a coalition with the AfD; 2) for a long time, mainstream parties did not seem to offer serious alternatives concerning neoliberalism, but the Social Democrats have recently identified a candidate (if not yet a coherent program) that many voters consider a new choice; 3) it remains to be seen whether this »Schultz-Factor« will hold until the election and the same is true for the currently less pressing immigration situation – it has only eased up in Germany, stealing the AfD's thunder, but certainly not in general (and terrorist attacks remain a threat); 4) like right-wing populists before them, the AfD's representatives in state parliaments and local bodies have been obsessed with immigration and Islam (which are largely not handled at these levels) that they are increasingly seen as incompetent; 5) similarly, at all levels, the AfD has been preoccupied with constant and largely public infighting between the different factions;

including 6) an element of clear right-wing extremism, bordering on Nazism and toying with Holocaust denial.

6. Conclusion

There are national-specific reasons for the rise of right-wing populists and authoritarian nationalists in Europe and North America, but I have argued that there is a common theme as well: Governments in Europe and North America failed to socially regulate processes of economic globalization and cultural change in a way that would have ameliorated the increased competition resulting from trade and immigration (not to mention the global injustice vis-à-vis the Global South). People who feel more secure in the face of increasing competition have an easier time to adapt to changing circumstances. They will then also see the benefits of change (e.g. the cultural riches available as a result of more openness) and realize that national identities are constantly in flux in countries that have been open to immigration for centuries. The time to establish such regulations was the late 1990s when China wanted to become a member of the WTO and when the EU was extended to the east. At the time, business and political elites, including left-of-center parties who were in government in many places, only saw the opportunities, namely the Chinese and East European markets and production locations with low levels of wages and regulations.

The failure to socially regulate economic globalization and cultural change has given rise to pessimism, fear and anger among those directly affected and those concerned about a loss of status. Right-wing populists and authoritarian nationalists have been able to capitalize on these developments. In the context of the current backlash against globalization, the trend is towards a re-nationalization of policy (»taking control«), including increased protectionism and corporate tax cuts to increase competitiveness and the attractiveness of production locations – take note of what the UK envisions for the time after a »hard Brexit« and what Trump wants to achieve in the US. There is a grave danger that beggar-thy-neighbor policies and trade wars will ensue (especially once an economic crisis begins and unemployment rises). Such a race to the bottom will hurt exactly the people who have supported Donald Trump and those who support the Front National in France, and else where.



A focus on the nation-state to socially regulate the consequences of global competition, as envisioned by, among others, German sociologist Wolfgang Streeck (in: »The Great Regression«), is infeasible because all national social and regulatory measures translate into costs for governments and business, thus decreasing competitiveness (granted, for Germany this solution is more feasible than for most others). Harvard University's Economist Dani Rodrik rightly argues that global rules are necessary to allow for more national policy space. Rodrik, however, mostly suggests procedural rules, while I would argue that governments should strive for »non-aggression pacts,« i.e., mutual assurances to not lower taxes and standards in the name of increased competitiveness. In any case, it will be very hard to find the political coalitions to implement any such global rules.



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