

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

THE GLOBAL RADICAL RIGHT

Transatlantic networks

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Donald Trump is back as president – and as a leading figure for the global radical right. He will likely leave its transatlantic networking to others. That creates openings for European – in particular, Hungarian – actors.



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Donald Trump is back as president – and as a leading figure for the global radical right. His administration will likely leave the work of transatlantic networking of the radical right largely to private actors, including the organisers of the CPAC and NatCon conferences, Christian nationalist organisations and organic intellectuals like Steve Bannon. That creates openings for European organisations – in particular those around the Hungarian Fidesz party.



The Trump administration's programme for transforming the democratic institutions of the United States can be interpreted as »Orbánisation«. Americanisation of the global right through hyper-political culture wars and tribal affective polarisation is now followed by a Europeanisation: the mainstreaming of the radical right in the party-political system and the deliberate introduction of illiberal, hyper-majoritarian forms of democracy.



The strength the global radical right should not be overstated, nor the international coherence of their strategies. But they do profit from a hardening of the political culture, both in their emotionalised and hyperpolitical communication (not only in the social media) and in election campaigns and parliamentary work. The defenders of liberal democracy need to take that into account.

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1 INTRODUCTION: ORBÁNISATION OF THE UNITED STATES?

International networking has become a central strategy of the radical right, who have recognised that their fight against the hegemony of the »global liberal elites« has to be conducted globally (cf. Greven 2024a). We are witnessing a convergence of the identity-defining frames of the global radical right, driven by international diffusion, learning and networking processes. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is a central figure, whose concept of »illiberal democracy« promotes hyper-majoritarian, anti-pluralist government without the traditional checks and balances. This represents an existential challenge to liberal democracy and the pluralist society.

The »imagined community« (Benedict Anderson 1983) of the European radical right styles itself as the »defender of the West« and »Western values« against external and internal enemies: against the global liberal elites and the minorities they supposedly favour. This personalisation of the collective struggle against »globalism« and »wokeism« is bound up with an emotionalisation of the political communication of the radical right. Diffusion and networking processes create a transnational, hyper-political spiral of radicalisation. And because the politics of affective polarisation is more successful than realistic problem-solving, the corresponding communication strategies proliferate internationally.

Although the radical right has not to date produced any kind of proto-fascist mass movement or collective international leadership, its global movement is highly dynamic. The radical right is better organised and highly motivated, nationally as well as internationally. In a context of growing hyper-politicisation the »reactionary revolutionaries« of the global radical right are considerably easier to mobilise than the defenders of liberal democracy.

It is important to keep the strength of the global radical right in perspective. As long as they reject any form of ethno-pluralism, what unites them will also divide them: their nationalism, putting »our country first«. But there is no denying that radical-right parties are prospering in many democracies.

Donald Trump's victory in the November 2024 presidential election will allow him to reclaim leadership of the global movement of the radical right. The result has been widely interpreted as a »change election,« where people were dissatisfied with the status quo and voted against the incumbent party. But the campaign was accompanied – absolutely correctly – by warnings that Trump posed a fundamental danger to democracy and he profited from polarising currents that are also observed in other Western democracies (see Section 3): a movement against demographic change; a movement against secularisation; a movement to the right among workers; and a new men's movement.

First of all, it was no coincidence that Trump entered the political stage during the presidency of Barack Obama, who embodied America's demographic shift towards a

»majority-minority society« and the associated hopes of the Democrats that they were heading for a structural majority. Demographers predict that by the 2040s aggregate ethnic minorities will outnumber white Americans. Trump put a face to white majority fears of losing their political, socio-cultural and perhaps even economic privileges. One could say he presented himself as the »last hope« for the white voter. Furthermore, the Tea Party movement that paved the way for Trump was directed not only against Obama but also against the Republican Party's own establishment: the party's base vehemently rejected their leaders' efforts to court ethnic minorities in response to Obama's success. In the end Trump reaped the gains, and blew away the party's established leaders in quick succession.

As well as harnessing this reactionary revolt of the white majority through aggressive anti-migrant rhetoric and policies, Trump – secondly – tapped the support of evangelical and conservative Christians, who are motivated above all by fundamental opposition to abortion. Trump has become their champion – despite his obvious moral failings – and has taken up their fight against cultural change, in particular opposing LGBTQ rights and upholding the traditional roles of men and the family.

Thirdly – and paradoxically given his pride in his wealth – Trump has positioned himself at the head of a working-class revolt against all forms of globalisation (at least if, as Americans tend to do, one defines the working class as those without a college degree). Whether the issue is Chinese, Mexican, or European trade competition, or competition through migration, or efforts to cushion competition through international agreements and institutions – Trump condemns it all as »globalism.« Trump's anti-globalist rhetoric exposes a weakness shared by the Democrats and the traditional establishment of the Republican Party. It allows him to exploit fears about unemployment and unaffordable housing as well as anger about high prices for energy, food, and everyday necessities.

Fourthly, Trump has also become the voice of (primarily conservative Christian and traditionalist) men who fear a loss of status as society changes culturally and economically. These fears appear to be more prevalent among members of the working class than among university graduates. This is probably why Trump was able to improve his vote among male Latinos and Black Americans, to whom he explicitly extended his promise to protect workers from competition by deporting migrants and imposing trade tariffs. But many young men were also drawn in by a misogynistic influencer culture in social media, whose influence on all the aforementioned movements can hardly be overstated.

Even if most of the Republican Party's voters are not primarily ideologically motivated, the party has come to be dominated by forces that are determined to completely remake the country's culture and politics. »We want our country back!« has been their battle cry since the Tea Party movement. These reactionary revolutionaries absolutely reject the open pluralistic society, which they label with the codes of the global

movement of the radical right: »globalism«, »wokeism« and »global elites«.

Trump election victory makes him a figurehead of the global right again, for his domestic political plans as much as his sovereigntist course (»America First«). »Project 2025« was a big talking point during the campaign. This proposed programme for Trump's second term, prepared by the Heritage Foundation and others, can also be read as a playbook for an Orbánisation of the United States. Its proposed expansion of presidential powers makes a mockery of the Republicans' traditional claim to be the party of small government. The advocates of illiberal or hyper-majoritarian democracy seek to abolish all national and international checks and balances that stand in the way of the president's power: rule of law, independence of the judiciary and media, a vibrant civil society, a professional civil service, beholden to the law rather than personal loyalty to the president. Like Orbán in Hungary, Trump sees himself as a democrat – in the sense that he was elected by a majority and can therefore do as he pleases.

The present analysis concerns the transatlantic networking of the North American and European movements of the radical right. A previous paper focussed on European networking within and beyond the European Parliament (Greven 2024a). The distinction is a little artificial, because many of the conferences and other networking events involve both those axes (and others). The present analysis focusses on in-person networking of parliamentary parties and their associated organisations (NGOs, foundations, think tanks), rather than on international contacts between violent actors or online networking (including disinformation campaigns such as those controlled and/or funded by Russia). While both of those phenomena are undoubtedly significant for the diffusion of ideas and inspiration, I would argue that in-person networking of classical political actors is more important for the emergence of a social movement and functions to consolidate the impact of the other activities.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE ANALYSIS

In Section 2, I discuss key concepts and approaches to the analysis of the cross-border networking of the radical right. The focus of Section 3 is the common driving forces behind the political success of the radical right in almost all democracies. Sections 2 and 3 are taken from »The Radical Right in Europe: Transnational Networks« (Greven 2024a) and can potentially be skipped over. Section 4 examines transatlantic relations among the fringes of the global radical right, while Section 5 turns to Steve Bannon's ambitions to forge a transnational radical right, along American lines. Institutionalised connections, such as the conferences described in Section 6, are even more important. In Section 7, I discuss the special relationship between Hungary and the United States, specifically between Orbán and Trump. In conclusion, Section 8 lays out the challenges of the current »interregnum« as we move towards a post-neoliberal order and presents recommendations for combatting the radical right.

2 ANALYSING THE RADICAL RIGHT

We shall use the collective term »radical right« to identify and analyse the actors examined within the framework of this study. This is primarily a pragmatic choice. None of the possible competing terms – above all national conservative, authoritarian right, right-wing populists, right-wing radicals, or right-wing extremists – capture the full spectrum of the actors we are looking at here. They range from those parties of the conservative mainstream which have already shifted to the right, i.e. the so-called »radicalised conservatives« (Strobl 2021) such as the US Republican Party (Greven 2024b) and a growing portion of the British Tories (Bale 2023; see also Biebricher 2023), as well as those conservative parties in the EU who are increasingly willing »to align with the populist radical right, either directly or indirectly, to gain power« (Rovira Kaltwasser et al. 2024), thereby normalising their positions, to such right-wing extremist actors who do not rely (exclusively) on political violence and subversion, but compete primarily within the political system.

The radical right span a very wide range of ideological and political positions. What they have in common is that, although they generally accept democratic ways of doing things, they not only want to win elections but also intend to wrench established liberal democracies fundamentally in an illiberal, anti-pluralist and authoritarian direction. They reject the separation of powers and protection of political minorities under the rule of law.

The competing terms for »radical right« we have already mentioned are often used interchangeably in political debate and media discourse. In Germany, for example, the term »right-wing populist« is in common use, mainly to designate the spectrum between conservatives and right-wing extremists. It thus has the effect of downplaying, even trivialising the phenomenon. Although populism as a »thin-centred ideology« (Cas Mudde: »us vs. them«) has affinities with right-wing programmes, the term is more suitable to describe a type of political strategy. Even the collective term chosen here, »radical right«, cannot always be applied in a clear-cut way. This is because the actors under examination change dynamically, both ideologically and in terms of their political strategies. This applies both over the course of time and for regional or organisational subunits. Political parties are not monolithic. Changes can run in different directions, towards more moderation or towards more extremism.

2.1 EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CROSS-BORDER NETWORKING OF THE RADICAL RIGHT

Little or no organisational coordination is needed for the transnational diffusion of ideas, concepts, strategies, and tactics (see Abrahamsen et al. 2024). Publications are enough, especially on the internet, where translation tools are easily available. In order to find out exactly how to block democratic processes or exploit or undermine elements of the rule of law in a specific national context, language skills are needed – but obtaining fundamental inspiration from

blocking strategies in other countries is possible without such skills. For example, Poland's Law and Justice Party (PiS), which was voted out of office in 2023, retains blocking options not only through the veto power of Polish president Andrzej Duda, but also through the partisan judges it appointed within the framework of judicial reform.

Communicative exchanges can also take place virtually, with the necessary language skills. However, it makes sense that physical network meetings provide for more diffusion and organisational coordination. These are to be the focus here.

Analysis of the extent and significance of the radical right's cross-border networking faces particular challenges. There are considerable access problems. Statements made by political actors can always be suspected of being directed by self-interest or propaganda. If international gatherings do not produce declarations, manifestos, or public agreements, we can usually only speculate on the significance of meetings of actors on the radical right and on what their concrete consequences may be.

Notwithstanding all these difficulties and limitations, the following sections show that many valuable insights are now available on the cross-border networks of the radical right. These are discussed and evaluated here, supplemented by my own research, in summary form. The focus is on the transatlantic networks of the radical right since the Brexit referendum of June 2016.

The point of departure for the present investigation of the transnational networks of the radical right is the analytical approach of Clifford Bob's comprehensive 2012 study (Bob 2012). He utilised the transnational advocacy networks (TAN) approach, which originates from NGO research, for his research on the »global right wing«. The underlying question is: under what conditions do political actors deploy scarce resources across borders in order to influence supranational institutions such as the EU and to effect change in other countries, as well as in their own country? Analogous to research on social movements, the focus is on political opportunity structures (POS), in other words, the existing conditions for action in a particular context. Actors on the radical right usually need to attack their opponents head-on, especially in election campaigns. But a »paradise abroad« (Heilbrunn 2024) can be created in third countries through cross-border cooperation with other actors of the radical right, and that can mobilise a national movement even when political opportunity structures are blocked for it. Bob (2012) was also able to show that cross-border activities also take place when political opportunity structures are relatively open in all contexts. Political actors always react to one another and in light of the global interconnectedness – economic, cultural and political – they also do so across borders.

This transnationally active radical right can be regarded as a global social movement, in other words as a constellation somewhere between an entirely unified actor and entirely dispersed actors. That is because national actors of the radical right mobilise resources for the formation of

cross-border networks and use the same or similar frames in their arguments, mobilisation and communications, as we shall show. They produce a common identity-establishing ideological framework for their own »in group« and for the »out group« that is the object of their ire (see Nissen 2022). The frames that shape the discourse of the global radical right can be formulated both negatively – anti-globalism, anti-immigration, anti-Islam, anti-wokeism (anti-LGBTQ and anti-gender identity), anti-liberalism, anti-establishment, sometimes also antisemitism – and affirmatively (nation, sovereignty, people, tradition, family, sometimes also white supremacy). The use of these frames is subject to constant transformation, depending on the available »political space« (ibid.).

2.2 THE RADICAL RIGHT'S TRANSNATIONAL »GRAMSCIAN TURN«

Successful transnational activities on the part of this global movement of the radical right strengthen their national successes and almost everywhere contribute substantially to the threat facing liberal democracy. Having said that, the so-called TAN approach falls short of explaining the overall political ambitions of this global movement. Because the radical right itself make reference to it, it makes sense to employ Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony to capture the macro-political significance of their transnational activities.

Political rule, according to Gramsci, remains incomplete and weak without cultural hegemony, even if it is achieved at the ballot box or by revolution. A consensus has to be established in society. Like part of the left, the authors of the Nouvelle Droite or New Right have invoked, among other things, Gramsci's insights on the necessity of »cultural hegemony« in order to underline that, besides electoral success, hearts and minds also need to be won over in a so-called »war of position« – in Gramsci's formulation their »common sense« – in order to achieve sustainable political dominance.

The empirical question in this context of this investigation is whether the »metapolitical« and »counter-hegemonic« project of the radical right outlined above is also being pursued across borders. Abrahamsen et al. (2024) write about this second, transnational Gramscian turn:

Nationalist and populist in character, this strategy is also international because its populism seeks to unify socially and geographically disparate groups through specific understandings of their marginalisation by liberalism and globalisation. (Abrahamsen et al. 2024: 3)

But who is organising the transnational networking of the opposition to »globalism« and »wokeism«? Gramsci puts forward the notion of the »organic intellectual«, political activists who assume a key role in the acquisition of political power, the struggle for hegemony and the economic basis of the movement. They are tasked with building the discursive and organisational structures of an »internationalist nationalism« (ibid.: 63) so that a global movement may emerge even without a central leadership: »The unity of the global

Right emerges instead from diverse demands articulated in ways that allow its participants to see and feel themselves as engaged in analogically similar struggles against a common enemy« (ibid.: 20). Before looking at the transatlantic networking activities, Section 3 focuses first on the cross-border commonalities of the rise of the radical right.

3 COMMON DRIVING FORCES UNDERLYING THE RISE OF THE GLOBAL RADICAL RIGHT

How can the rightward shift observed in almost all democracies in recent years be explained? We can assume that nationally specific reasons for the rise of the radical right are dominant. That applies to both the »demand side« – in other words people's specific issues or grievances – and the »supply side«. Indeed, the institutional and discursive conditions (POS, see above) differ from country to country, in some cases significantly. Thus, the parties of the radical right pursue different strategies. However, if there are commonalities across countries in the area of »grievances«, it is plausible, if not probable, that political strategies will also converge. In what follows I argue that there are three sets of cross-national causes that can be identified as common denominators of the shift to the right: economic globalisation, cultural modernisation and a widespread crisis and democracy fatigue. These causal complexes then also appear transnationally as central narratives of the increasingly transnationally active radical right.

3.1 ECONOMIC GLOBALISATION

Perhaps the »leanest« explanation for the political development towards the right is a focus on »globalisation losers« or »transformation losers,« which some economists propose. But the simplistic deprivation thesis, namely that the social segments under severe economic pressure are particularly likely to vote for parties of the radical right, has been empirically refuted time and time again. What really matters is, on one hand, a loss of status or fears of sliding down the social scale as a consequence of an intensification of global competition, and, on the other hand, specific regional structural features that have resulted in or give reasons to expect negative economic developments.

After the failure to rein in economic globalisation, which had accelerated rapidly in the wake of the hegemony of neoliberal economic policy in the 1990s, with effective regulation (case in point, the supply chain law), a political backlash from those who were negatively affected by this transformation was possible if not likely. The benefits of free trade, free movement of capital and labour migration are always distributed unequally and thus there is always opposition, from the left and the right. Today, however, in many places social democratic and also leftwing parties are perceived as cheerleaders for economic liberalisation and globalisation. Furthermore, their proposals for regulation are a form of globalisation (»global governance«) and are also rejected by

advocates of greater national sovereignty. The backlash is thus now coming largely from the right.

The radical right in other words has ushered in a personalised, joint war against a » global liberal elite« made up of experts, bureaucrats and an »economic aristocracy ... detached and unmoored from their respective national identities and cultures« (Abrahamsen/Williams 2023: 29). Thus, despite protectionist inclinations among sections of the radical right, it is not world trade per se that is rejected, but rather the rules and institutions created by international agreements and memberships, administered and implemented by bureaucrats. This joint struggle against a definable and globally active »enemy« explains the increasingly transnational networking and is making the radical right more and more into a global movement. Moreover, its alleged stance on behalf of a »forgotten working class« has been turning it into a sort of »reactionary International«.

Trade competition in Europe does not shape the political debate to the same extent as in the United States, but opening up the financial markets for foreign investment and investment capital has fuelled the discussion on the disadvantages of economic location competition here too. Above all, however, the financial crisis of 2008–2009 highlighted that neoliberal policies had privatised profits, while, in the face of systemic risks, states – and thus taxpayers – had been landed with the losses. Considerable political opposition began to accumulate against the bailouts of the big banks and financial institutions, but this was scarcely represented in the established party system. The result of the Brexit referendum in June 2016, which led to the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union in January 2020, was also due partly to the debate on the financial crisis.

Migration played an even bigger role in the growing isolationism and »souverainism« in the United Kingdom, as it was soon to do also in the United States and many continental European countries, especially in the wake of the so-called refugee crisis of 2015. A representation deficit can also be discerned in migration policy, whether it be about regular labour market migration, refugees or asylum seekers. The people who are not on board with migration policy, whether as a whole or to a considerable extent, find that their views are represented almost exclusively by the parties of the right.

3.2 CULTURAL MODERNISATION

Economically determined approaches are not the whole story, however. Alternative explanations attribute the causes of increasing radical right-wing attitudes and radical right-wing voting to people's reactions to various cultural changes in the direction of more diversity. These include the considerable shocks inflicted on male dominated societies by women's efforts towards emancipation and equality; the trend towards secularisation, which has affected almost all nominally Christian countries for decades now and has loosened the binding force of religion when it comes to traditional roles and the balance of power in families and partnerships; and changing morality in the area of sexuality,

especially the rising acceptance of homosexuality and, more recently, of an ever more visible transsexuality.

These cultural changes have mobilised people whose moral outlook is largely based on religion to become more politically active and to advocate for the conservation of »traditional values«. They have contributed a great deal to the success of the Christian and radical right. But which issue is mobilised and at what time has to be explained in nationally specific terms. In some countries, such as in Scandinavian countries, certain societal and cultural changes are now so widely accepted that political mobilisation against them seems pointless. Some radical right parties are adapting accordingly and focusing on »European values«, including even the defence of LGBTQ rights against Muslim immigrants.

The phenomenon of labour and refugee migration shows that the discussion of cultural change as a driver of the rise of the radical right is not entirely independent of the problems of globalisation. In the eyes of some (and that includes earlier migrants and their offspring), migrants embody both economic competition and processes of cultural change. They make the challenges of diversity more concrete and thus can be identified as (allegedly) responsible for societal problems such as unemployment, lack of housing and crime, despite the fact those problems would also exist without them. Accordingly, the radical right almost everywhere are igniting heated debates about integration, assimilation, »normality« and »dominant cultures«, as well as about deportation (»remigration«) and segregation, especially with regard to migrants who differ from the majority society in terms of skin colour and/or religion.

For the radical right it's easier and more politically rewarding to launch culture wars in defence of identities whose foundations have been shaken than to debate the pros and cons of economic globalisation. They are relatively inexpensive. You can get a lot of political bang for your buck with little effort, partly because cultural conflicts are less amenable to compromise than economic conflicts. This leads to an emotionalised race to the bottom and the radical right simply find it easier than any other political actors to harness populist incitement of outrage, »affective polarisation«, fear and anger to achieve political success. The radical right can depend for help on conservative, radical and commercial media, which have cottoned on that the populist »hyperpolitics« (Jäger 2023) of anxiety and anger is a very profitable business model. Changes to the media landscape have been a boon to the radical right, including commercialisation, the weakening of the editorial gatekeeper function, the personalisation of »politainment«, the ease and anonymity of disseminating disinformation on social media and the innovations of so-called »artificial intelligence« (»deep fakes«).

3.3 WIDESPREAD CRISIS AND DEMOCRACY FATIGUE

A third cross-country approach to explaining the rise of the radical right in almost all democracies is a widespread sense of overload and a general fatigue with politics and demo-

cratic processes. This sense of crisis enables demagogues, populists, and wannabe autocrats to mobilise effectively, based on the abovementioned deficit of economic and cultural representation. In doing so they open up social divisions, so that conflicts can no longer be resolved within the framework of the established party system. This triggers a vicious circle.

In the current »polycrisis« crises constantly overlap. States and citizens are permanently overloaded. Crises include global refugee movements, climate crisis, systemic competition, above all with China, military conflicts, and the threat of the next pandemic. And solutions are nowhere to be seen. The consequence is that some people take seriously alternatives to the established pluralist party democracy, such as Viktor Orbán's »illiberal democracy« (see Section 7).

Daron Acemoglu (2024) writes on this topic »the simple explanation for the crisis of democracy in the whole industrialised world is that the system has not kept its promises«. And the forces of the radical right are virtually the sole beneficiaries of the disenchantment with democracy and political parties, the undemocratic juridification and bureaucratisation (Manow 2024), and the loss of trust in the state. They have been able to »unite the fundamental »no« to politics« (Nils Kumkar, interview, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 17 January 2024).

It is easy for some to tumble down the rabbit hole of conspiracy theories, such as the so-called »great replacement«, the alleged plan of global elites to replace the white population with non-white migrants. For some, it suffices if there is a semi-plausible narrative with an identifiable scapegoat.

3.4 INTERIM CONCLUSION: COMMON DRIVERS

There are therefore common factors in the rise of the radical right: globalisation, cultural change, and widespread democracy fatigue. But does this yield a greater cross-border unity of the radical right?

Looking at the dynamics of cross-border cooperation among the radical right over a longer period, it turns out that ideological cohesion and organisational cooperation have increased. Above all the radical right is now formulating a counter-hegemonic claim: it is not seeking to reform or escape global liberal hegemony, but to destroy it, to reshape the world in its own image. For example, today most of the radical right parties in Europe have abandoned the idea of leaving the European Union. Instead, they want to »take over Brussels« (cf. Greven 2024a). They may also come to realise that they have more to gain from taking over international institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund than from abolishing them (Feffer 2021). The transnational networking activities of the extremist fringe (see Section 4) and organic intellectuals like Steve Bannon (Section 5), as well as a growing number of international conferences and other forums (Section 6) serve to advance these counter-hegemonic goals. Orbán's »illiberal democracy« serves as an

inspiration and model for the radical right, and Hungary is also actively exporting the concept (see Section 7).

4 THE TRANSATLANTIC RIGHT: THE EXTREMIST BREEDING GROUND OF THE RADICAL RIGHT

The existence of significant political relationships between the North American and European radical right is a comparatively recent development – above all since the rise of Donald Trump. But there is also a history of close contacts and mutual inspiration between right-wing extremists who today populate the fringes of the radical right on both sides of the Atlantic (cf. Kaplan/Weinberg 1998) and whose propensity for violence presents a significant danger. For example, groups like the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers played an important role in the storming of the US Capitol on 6 January 2021, following Trump's election defeat.

American right-wing extremists have always been fascinated by German National Socialism, and have founded corresponding political parties (including George Lincoln Rockwell's American Nazi Party in the 1960s and Gary Lauck's Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei – Auslandsorganisation). To this day, old-style Nazi symbolism remains popular in extreme right-wing circles. Funding, for example for legal defence for extremists, tends to flow from North America to Europe, while America's strong free speech laws attract European right-wing extremists, who base some of their websites and political and commercial activities (such as merchandising and music) in the United States. The importance of the internet for transatlantic networking cannot be overstated. YouTube, social media like Twitter, Gab, Minds and Telegram, and message boards like 8chan, 4chan and Reddit serve to disseminate conspiracy myths, hate speech and antisemitism in both directions. Much of this occurs through post-organisational channels independent of party structures: individual and sometimes anonymous influencers and »super-sharers.«

The far right in Europe has traditionally opposed any »Americanisation« of culture. But today right-wing extremists place the solidarity of the »white race« against Islam and migration above other concerns. Dealing with these groups and their transatlantic networking is in the first place a matter for intelligence services, counter-terrorism, and policing (for example entry bans). But the rise of the radical right has led to a mainstreaming of extremist ideas. For example, the conspiracy narrative of the »great replacement«, which originated in France and has been disseminated by the Identitarian movement, has been taken up quite broadly in the United States and imbued with an anti-Semitic slant (»Jews will not replace us«). Conversely European right-wing extremists (along with other fringe groups such as the »Reichsbürger«) have been influenced by American conspiracy myths such as QAnon, and in some cases – like their American counterparts – hope that Donald Trump will bring them closer to realising their insurrectionary plans for »white supremacy.«

5 SMOKE AND MIRRORS? STEVE BANNON'S TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

In 2015 Bloomberg News called Steve Bannon »the most dangerous political operative in America« on account of his central role in Donald Trump's success. Bannon is a flamboyant character with a studiously unkempt appearance, a »limousine populist« who got rich as an investment banker and media entrepreneur. And he can talk: »Bannon talks big and grabs headlines. As a politico and filmmaker, he's a master illusionist« (Feffer 2021: 8). His contacts with Nigel Farage and the Tory Jacob Rees-Mogg date from his time as vice president of Cambridge Analytica, when he worked in the background for the 2016 Brexit campaign. Despite being a convinced nationalist Bannon has worked hard to initiate transnational networking.

Bannon has advanced the development of the »alt right« movement through a strategy of bringing together the radical and extremist right with the conservatives. He was initially a supporter of the Tea Party, and foresaw the revolt of »middle America« after the 2008/2009 financial crisis. Trump or Sanders? »The only question before us is: is it going to be populist nationalism or populist socialism« (quoted in *ibid.*: 5).

Bannon distinguishes between a »healthy, productive capitalism« and a »perverted, speculative capitalism« that he argues benefits the globalist elites at the expense of ordinary people (Steffek/Lasshof 2022). His nationalist »producerism« appears to stand in the social protectionist tradition of welfare chauvinism (and would fit with the changing electoral base of the parties of the radical right, which are increasingly becoming »workers' parties«). Yet Bannon, although no libertarian, rejects the social democratic welfare state. He closes the conceptual gap with concept of good honest American entrepreneurship that draws on Catholic influences. Returning to the Christian roots to save America is also a motif in his films, such as *Torchbearer* (director: Stephen Bannon, United States, 2016). Bannon's economic nationalism presupposes that states will fight by all means necessary to win the best »deals« (which aligns him with Trump). It remains unclear whether he also supports the sweeping protectionist tariffs that Trump is proposing for his second term.

After winning the election in 2016 Trump showed no interest in promoting a »nationalist international«. It was Bannon who – after quickly losing his post as Trump's chief political strategist – assumed the mantle of »organic intellectual« and took on the task of transnationally networking the radical right in Europe and beyond, with the goal of fomenting a traditionalist »revolution« to sweep away the liberal status quo.

After gaining a reputation as Trump's mastermind, Bannon set off on a kind of world tour spring 2018 in order to establish a network (especially in Europe) and conduct an »organizing upgrade« (Feffer 2021: 3). This involved establishing a movement in Brussels with the Belgian politician Mischaël Modrikamen and setting up a »gladiator school«

in Italy, with support from the Brit Benjamin Harnwell and in collaboration with Catholic Dignitatis Humanae Institute, to train »culture warriors« to defend Western Judeo-Christian culture (Forti 2024). Some of the funding for these plans came from the Chinese billionaire Guo Wengui. Bannon was convinced that these measures would build a Europe-wide radical right that would do very well in the 2019 European parliament elections or at least be able to impede the process of European integration. He even permitted a documentary filmmaker to attend planning meetings, for example when he met with Nigel Farage and Belgian, French, and Swedish activists in London in July 2018. As he said in the film: »We help knit together this populist nationalist movement throughout the world« (*The Brink*, director: Alison Klayman, United States, 2019). Bannon also travelled to Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, Japan, and Israel. For a while it all seemed to be going well. Giorgia Meloni was interested in strengthening ties with the Republican Party (which exist formally through the European Conservatives and Reformists Party), and invited Bannon to the Atreju conference in Rome, where her Fratelli d'Italia party was also planning to network the radical right. However, Marine Le Pen, with whom Bannon also met, subsequently found herself facing accusations of conniving with foreign powers.

Bannon predicted that the 2019 European parliament elections would leave the »heart of the globalist project« looking like »Stalingrad« (Serrao 2019). As we know, that was not to be, and neither the »movement« nor the »gladiator school« progressed beyond the planning phase – perhaps in part because of anti-American reservations among some of the potential participants. However, even if Bannon failed to achieve immediate success (Lewis 2018) that does not mean that he has no influence. The discursive and media strategies that he developed for his radical right-wing news portal Breitbart and still practises in his talk show *War Room* have been particularly influential. Above all he has succeeded in mainstreaming radical theories and conspiracy narratives such as the »great replacement« through massive dissemination in alternative media. Secondly, he made great use of the technique of »flooding the zone with shit« (engulfing the debate with provocations and half-truths; also known as »gish galopp«).

Bannon's »economic nationalism« goes down very well in his public appearances, for example at the Conservative Political Action Conferences (see Section 6). But Trump's proposed cabinet appointments suggest that his second term will bring the kind of »crony capitalism« that Bannon supposedly rejects. Perhaps he will turn away again from Trump – for whom he served four months in prison for refusing to testify to the committee investigating the 6 January attack on the US Capitol – and devote his energy to transnational networking on radical right instead? Plans for a German version of his podcast *War Room* have been rumoured. To help the AfD? Given its success and social media competence, the AfD does not look to be in any need of Bannon's help.

6 TRANSATLANTIC NETWORKING OF THE RADICAL RIGHT: INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

Transnational and transatlantic networking of the radical right is no longer a largely clandestine affair, and has become part of the »new normal« (Lewis 2019). For example, in spring 2024 a string of AfD politicians, some of them with connections to the Identitarian movement, attended a gala at the New York Young Republican Club, to which Donald Trump, Steve Bannon and Rudi Giuliani were also invited. After the gala a satisfied Maximilian Krah (now excluded from the AfD group in the European Parliament) declared on social media: »It is crucial for right-wing patriots to network globally« (quoted in Biermann et al. 2024). While the existence of the meeting was public, nothing is known about what was discussed or agreed there.

Often it is the personal contacts that breathe life into networking. It is no surprise that there are so many meetings involving American, Canadian, and British activists. Even where the political objectives are compatible a shared language is helpful. Nigel Farage, formerly of UKIP and one of the driving forces behind Brexit, now leads Reform UK (Farage founded and owns the party, which operates as a limited company). He was quick to cultivate contacts in the United States and hired US consultants in order to learn from Trump's populism. In 2018 he appeared on conspiracy theorist Alex Jones's notorious show *Infowars*. Only a native speaker could pull that off. On the show Farage called the EU »the prototype for the new world order,« a right-wing cipher that Jones's listeners would have understood (quoted in Lewis 2019).

A certain amount of transatlantic networking occurs simply through coincidental timing. One example of this would be the solidarity in 2022 between the »Freedom Convoy« in Canada, which was sparked by truck drivers protesting against Covid measures, and the Dutch farmers' protests. Here again media like Tucker Carlson's *Today* (then on Fox) played an important role in giving protest leaders a platform to disseminate conspiracy narratives (in this case the »great reset,« where the World Economic Forum was supposedly using the pandemic to institute a new world order). As in the case of the anti-migrant Pegida offshoots, this kind of networking tends to be transient, and ceases when the moment passes. But certain contacts do survive and can be reactivated at the next opportunity.

As well as language difficulties and lack of resources, the specific national political opportunity structures (POS, see Section 2) often mitigate against steady contacts. European radical right parties have sometimes equivocated over Donald Trump's blunt and aggressive language during phases when they have been trying to appear moderate (the Sweden Democrats being a case in point). Such fears evaporated after migration became a hot topic in 2015 and even more so following Trump's victory in 2016 – and international learning processes were able to begin.

However well the personal level functions, successful long-term networking needs to be institutionalised. Thus, the US Republican Party is a »global partner« of the European Conservatives and Reformists Party (ECRP) led by Georgia Meloni, and the ECR's think tank New Direction maintains contacts with ultra-conservative American think tanks like the Heritage Foundation and the Acton Institute (cf. Greven 2024a). These formal contacts also enable more intimate and informal encounters such as Meloni's invitation to the National Prayer Breakfast in 2020, where she had private discussions with Republican members of Congress. After the event Meloni praised Trump's policies: »We also want to defend our products, our companies, our borders and our families« (Vampa 2023: 73).

The American Heritage Foundation maintains bilateral relations with the Hungarian Danube Institute (see Section 7) and participates in various international networks such as the ultra-libertarian Atlas Network. This also lends an international sheen to the reactionary Project 2025 for Trump's second term, which is clearly influenced by Hungary's »illiberal democracy« (ibid.) – especially if parts of the programme are actually implemented.

Internationally well networked think tanks also occasionally cooperate on a case-by-case basis. For example, the American Heartland Institute has funded the German climate-sceptical influencer Naomi Seibt who is close to the AfD's youth wing Junge Alternative.

A large-scale quantitative study of international contacts between individuals and institutions on the radical right (3,000 speakers from 1,800 different organisations at 302 conferences and other events in 35 countries between 2000 and 2024) found the organisers of two major conference series to be central nodes of a »truly transnational movement« (GPAHE 2024a). The two series are the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) und National Conservatism Conference (NatCon).

CPAC was originally a purely American event. Its trajectory and the trajectory of NatCon demonstrate the degree to which the radical right's international networking has intensified in recent years. The conferences have become more frequent and more countries are represented. Still, the largest number of speakers continue to be Americans (ibid.). The conferences also attract an increasing amount of media attention, in part because the political stars of the global right are gathered in one place. Above all these conference series, which are particularly generously funded, offer an opportunity to discuss issues strategies and tactics across the entire radical right spectrum – from traditional conservative parties to activists on the extremist fringe (ibid.).

6.1 CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL ACTION CONFERENCES – CPAC

The older of the two conference series is CPAC, which is organised by the American Conservative Union. It was first held in 1974 as a forum for the conservative Reagan faction in the

Republican Party; today it has become essentially »Trumpified« (cf. Greven 2024b). CPAC has international offshoots in countries including Australia, Brazil, Japan, Mexico and South Korea; CPAC Hungary is the most active. The third Budapest conference was held in April 2024, organised by the Orbán-aligned Center for Fundamental Rights. Viktor Orbán declared in English: »Make America great again, make Europe great again!« and continued in martial tone in Hungarian »Go Donald Trump! Go European sovereigntists! Let us saddle up, don our armour, take to the battlefield and let the electoral battle begin« (quoted in English at <https://www.cpachungary.com/en/>, accessed 2 December 2024).

When CPAC was still a purely American affair its purpose was to expand the Republican Party's conservative base (initially excluding extreme right groups such as the John Birch Society). At that time, it was already developing shared frames and narratives to overcome the hegemony of the New Deal; transformative American left liberalism was the enemy. Today's worldwide adversary is the »globalism« and »wokeism« of the supposedly dominant liberal global elites. Nigel Farage drew little attention at his first, pre-Brexit CPAC appearance; European issues were not yet seen as relevant. Now he is one of its international stars. His statement at CPAC 2022 in Texas placed him in the mainstream of conference participants, who see themselves as the true defenders of the West: »We are under attack. [...] It's not Putin, [...] the biggest threat we face is the fifth column inside all of our countries that is attempting to destroy the family unit, attempting to destroy our Judeo-Christian culture« (quoted in Sanders/Jenkins 2023). Almost nothing is beyond the pale today, with conspiracy mythologists like Jack Posobiec among the regular international speakers.

6.2 NATIONAL CONSERVATISM CONFERENCES – NATCON

CPAC conferences are said to cost three or four million dollars each to organise. The NatCon events organised by the US-based Edmund Burke Foundation are by all accounts in the same bracket. But the radical right appears to have no difficulty raising such sums: the number of conferences is growing, as is the number of participants – including attendees from abroad. Tech mogul and anarcho-capitalist Peter Thiel is among the financial backers of NatCon. So it is no coincidence that future US vice president JD Vance, who Thiel has long promoted, appears there regularly to expound his version of illiberal American nationalism.

Most of the NatCon conferences have been held in Europe: one in Rome, two in London, two in Brussels. The most recent, in July 2024, was the second to be held in Washington D.C. Their primary purpose is transatlantic networking, in particular between the United States and the United Kingdom. The apocalyptic rhetoric at NatCon in London in May 2023, with »conspiratorial and reactionary speeches« warning against »transgenderism«, »wokeism«, »cancel culture«, »neo-Marxism« and »globalists« and the »end of our way of life« (Lowles/Mulhall 2023: 17), demonstrated just how far to the right the discourse has shifted.

In addition to the two large-scale conference series, other such events include the three-day conference of the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship (ARC) held in London in 2024, with thousands of participants including the Canadian »anti-woke« influencer Jordan, the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Mike Johnson, and another US member of Congress.

Ultra-conservative Christian actors like the originally Russian-American World Congress of Families (in which the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian radical right actors were active until the Ukraine war, cf. Stoeckl 2020), the Alliance Defending Freedom International and the Political Network for Values operate as transnational advocacy networks (see Section 2), taking their global fight against feminism, abortion and LGBTQ rights to targeted countries as well as operating within the United Nations and its agencies. One vehicle for their campaigning is the anti-abortion Geneva Consensus Declaration, which was promoted by Hungary and the first Trump administration (Sanders/Jenkins 2023). In view of the strength of secular liberalism in Western Europe, ultra-conservative Christian actors tend to focus their efforts on Eastern Europe and the Global South, where they support ultra-conservative Evangelical Churches. In this context they also organise conferences to which radical right politicians are invited to speak. The latter profit from this politicisation of religion, even if many of them only pay lip service to Christian values themselves. Often, they are post-Christian »godless crusaders« (Cremer 2023), »hijacking ... religion« (ibid.). Here one can speak of an all-round »globalization of the American cultural wars« (title of a conference at the Berkeley Center, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTyarnDJ6B0>, accessed 2 December 2024), which are currently dominated by a radical »anti-trans hate machine« (Brockschmidt 2022).

We rarely learn what agreements were actually reached at the various conferences, nor whether anything ever came of them. For example at NatCon 2022 in Miami Balázs Orbán, political advisor to Viktor Orbán (but not related), spoke for the first time about a »wokebusters« initiative: »History is back, the specter haunting Western civilization, nowadays, the specter of »woke«, and when there is something strange in the Western world, who are you going to call?... The Wokebusters. We need Wokebusters to counter the Woke-Leviathan« (quoted in GPAHE 2024b). At CPAC Hungary in 2024 »wokebusters« was the conference theme, proposing a »global campaign against the globalists«. An official declaration was adopted and conference organiser Miklos Szánthó of the Center for Fundamental Rights joined Gavin Wax, president of the New York Young Republicans Club, to launch a »rapid reaction force and political action coalition of Conservatives in the international arena.« The declaration (a »pledge in the name of freedom, order and security to drain the swamp and take the West back«) gained more than one hundred prominent signatories, including the leaders of many radical right parties in Europe and the American conspiracy mythologist Jack Posobiec. The first meeting of the wokebusters task force was held in September 2024 in Hungary. As well as Gavin Wax the US participants included

Robert Law from the America First Policy Institute and James Carafano from the Heritage Foundation (ibid.).

Above all the conferences allow the political leaders and »organic intellectuals« of the national parties and organisations to formulate and test shared narratives and messages, to celebrate electoral victories and other successes, and altogether to attract attention as a coherent and growing movement. The speeches and declarations at these radical right gatherings represent a performative element of the counter-hegemonic strategy of an increasingly global movement. The images are carefully arranged to symbolise unity. They create greater media impact than nebulous joint declarations about political demands and strategies. The narrative of political success communicated through appearances by prominent election winners and media stars is supplemented by a narrative of collective struggle built on shared frames. Opposition to »globalism« (meaning global liberal elites and migrants) and »wokeism« (anti-racism, gender equality and LGBTQ rights, especially trans rights) are recurring themes. »Where globalism goes to die« was the motto of CPAC Washington in February 2024, where speakers from Europe included Nigel Farage (Reform UK) and Santiago Abascal (Vox, Spain).

7 A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP: TRUMP AND ORBÁN

Although Donald Trump and Viktor Orbán did not meet in person until 2019 they have developed what Richárd Demény of the Hungarian think tank Political Capital called a kind of »bromance«. This »special relationship« is not about relations between the United States and Hungary in general. That was demonstrated beyond doubt in 2023 when Orbán visited Washington to attend a conference of the ultra-conservative Heritage Foundation and formalise the Foundation's cooperation with Hungary's Fidesz-aligned Danube Institute – but did not meet with Joe Biden or any representative of his administration.

Today the American radical right regards Hungary as an example to emulate, and speaks of the urgent need for an »Orbanization of America« (Shapiro/Végh 2024). This development has not come about by accident, but has been pushed hard by American ultra-conservative intellectuals, think tanks and publications – and by Orbán himself, Fidesz-aligned organisations and the Hungarian government (cf. Cabrera Cuadrado/Chrobak 2023). Steve Bannon was perhaps the first to discover an interest in Orbán's government and publicly declared him »one of my heroes« in 2016. But interest in Hungary only really acquired momentum towards the end of Trump's first presidency. While Fidesz found partners on the fringes of the Republican Party who they could invite to conferences, Fidesz-aligned Hungarian think tanks and foundations such as the Danube Institute and the Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC) established fellowships for ultra-conservative American intellectuals like Rod Dreher, Christopher F. Rufo and Michael O'Shea, who in turn lauded

Hungary in their publications. For example, Rod Dreher wrote in the *American Conservative*: »turn east, young conservative« (quoted in Scheppele 2022). In 2021 Tucker Carlson (then still with Fox) spent a week reporting from Budapest and praised Hungary as a model. Kevin Roberts, president of the Heritage Foundation, said in 2022: »Modern Hungary is not just a model for conservative statecraft, but the model« (quoted in Shapiro/Végh 2024).

At the same time Viktor Orbán, who tweets in English, presented himself explicitly as the guardian of Western values. He claims to defend the (ideally homogenous) nation, the (preferably traditional and definitely heterosexual) family and Christianity (which is synonymous with civilisation for most of the radical right) against enemies internal (globalist, liberal elites) and external (migrants especially Muslims) (cf. Hillebrand 2024). The Fidesz-aligned Center for Fundamental Rights, which organises the Hungarian CPAC conferences, echoed that message: »[CPAC will] protect our Western civilization, our true Western values, and face down the onslaught of the Left« (quoted in Scheppele 2022).

Orbán implicitly also called for democratic institutions to be subverted for the sake of acquiring and maintaining power: »You also have to know how you should fight. My answer is: Play by your own rules! ... Politics, my Friends, are not enough – this war is a culture war« (Orbán 2022). His harsh policies against LGBTQ rights have served as a model (for example for the anti-gender and anti-trans policies of Florida's Governor Ron DeSantis) as has the »autocratic legalism« (Scheppele 2018) of Hungary's »illiberal democracy«.

This is a hyper-majoritarian democracy with autocratic tendencies that places no restraints on the elected majority and its representatives: neither through the rights of the parliamentary opposition nor through the protections of rule of law, an independent judiciary (especially constitutional courts), international treaties, a professional and independent civil service, free media, or a vibrant civil society. Here the »tyranny of the majority« overrides the checks and balances of the democratic liberal constitution and the pluralistic society.

As well as playing a leading role for the radical right in Europe (cf. Greven 2024a), Orbán has ensured that Hungary punches far above its geopolitical weight. During the 2024 US election campaign he could justifiably claim that: »We have entered the programme-writing system of President Donald Trump's team, and we have deep involvement there« (quoted in Shapiro/Végh 2024).

But will the »bromance« last now that Donald Trump is back in the White House? If Trump decided to claim leadership of the global radical right and throw resources behind it, Hungary would probably be unable to compete. But it is more likely that the Trump administration will concentrate on domestic economic and political transformation and leave the international networking to »organic intellectuals« like Steve Bannon, Christian organisations and think tanks.

Also, the pitfalls for friendly relations do not appear to lie in the probable trajectory of the US economic policy under Trump. In fact, it could be similar to Hungary's. While it is still unclear what economic course the second Trump administration will choose, it would be a big surprise if it were to actually pursue policies beneficial to its electoral base in the »working class« (people without college degrees, see above). A trend towards »crony capitalism« is more likely. Trump's proposals for key cabinet posts suggest that he will follow the Hungarian model here too: regulation, tax policy and public procurement will be used to reward political allies (including tech oligarchs like Elon Musk) and punish political opponents such as Democrat governors. Experience shows that this »state capture« produces only temporary economic growth followed by a long slump. But will the democratic institutions survive? Will voters be able to change course? Here the Hungarian example is not encouraging (Feffer 2021).

The »bromance« is more likely to be endangered by the Hungarian foreign policy of »connectivity,« seeking cordial relations in all directions in order to secure economic benefits (Orbán 2023). A second Trump-administration is less likely to object fundamentally to Hungary's openness towards Russia but will balk at its policy towards China. Strategic containment is a bipartisan consensus in the United States, where China is seen as a major geopolitical rival.

8 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: »ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE«

It is important to keep the power of the global radical right in perspective. Ideological conflicts and tensions weaken their cohesion: classical nationalism versus ethnopluralism (»white supremacy«), the place of Christianity, relations with Russia and China etc. Above all they fail to offer viable solutions for resolving the problems and representation deficits from which they benefit. Instead, their policies often end up aggravating difficulties. For example, the desire to restrict immigration and increase trade tariffs could lead to welfare losses, especially for their own electoral base. As long as the democratic institutions still function, corrections at the ballot box are always possible. The elected governments that follow will need to find just and sustainable solutions for the population's grievances.

The »reactionary revolutionaries« in Western democracies are not the only ones seeking to fundamentally change the world. Russia, China, and other authoritarian states are seeking greater sovereignty and a multipolar world order, as are populations across the Global South. One could say that the old slogan of the progressive globalisation-critical movement – »another world is possible« – has become the motto of a disparate global movement of the radical right seeking to replace the existing international institutions with an »approximation of the liberal order in illiberal terms« (Larry Rosenthal, Berkeley Center for Right-Wing Studies, quoted in Feffer 2021: 43).

The challenge to US hegemony and the liberal world order is not only external, through Russian and Chinese »sharp power« in the sense of targeted disinformation to divide Western societies and these days even a willingness to conduct hybrid warfare (sabotage). Trump's election victory means it now also comes from within. Trump prefers bilateral »deals« where the United States is always the stronger party. He wants to uphold American dominance, but without the »liberal infrastructure« of multilateral organisations and alliances (Alexander Cooley/Daniel Nexon 2020). But that erodes both the global security system and the global trade system. One should not invest too much hope in Orbán or Meloni defending European interests in Trump's Washington (or even wanting to do so).

One could say that the international community has taken a right turn, pushing the »post-neoliberal world« towards competitive nationalism rather than social/ecological global governance. This also represents a failure of the progressive (and moderate conservative) forces that bought into the neoliberal hegemony for much too long. One fundamental danger in the present »interregnum« (Antonio Gramsci) – the existential crisis of the old order, before the new can be born – is that capitalism can function perfectly well without democracy. What that means is that economic actors are not dependable allies for defending liberal democracy and the pluralistic society. Signs of this are evident in the authoritarian ultra-libertarian policies of Javier Milei in Argentina, the rise of the American »oligarchs« (Bernie Sanders) in the United States and the way »crony capitalism« in Hungary has progressed almost to the point of »state capture«.

So do we need a »new internationalism« to overcome all hegemony, including the American (Feffer 2021: 137)? Perhaps. But above all we need a determined and transnational mobilisation for a clear political agenda to defend democratic institutions that cannot – as too often in case of trade unions and environmental movements – be dismissed as beholden to special interests. Transnational collective action should supplement the national rather than substituting it. That requires considerable resources to be made available – to match the resources that the global radical right devotes to conferences like CPAC and NatCon. To date there are few progressive international forums and networks working to mobilise or to develop shared frames and strategies. The international forums that do exist serve above all to tackle policy problems and are therefore often perceived as instruments for agreeing to painful compromises. If we are to defend democracy and outmotivate the »reactionary revolutionaries« we will need a social movement and a mobilisation of progressive forces. And they will need to be transnationally networked.

It is not only in the United States that democrats (and Democrats) find it hard to understand that the rules of politics have changed beyond recognition. And I don't mean only on social media. In a context of emotionalised hyper-politicisation, affective polarisation and social and political tribalisation, the actors of the radical right exploit every opening offered by the democratic system. These are the very safeguards they want to deny to others as soon as they acquire the political

power to do so: freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and protections for political minorities. They challenge the government and provoke the public intentionally and repeatedly, deliberately violating social norms in the process, in order to shift the Overton window ever further to the right. Increasingly the emotions matter more than the substance. That also applies to the radical right's international social media communication, which is important but not addressed in the present contribution. Viable compromises are increasingly impossible – from which the radical right again profits.

Trump's election and the responses to it are a portent. Many observers regard Trump's second term as an existential threat to the democratic institutions of the United States; during the campaign Trump was called out as a fascist. But how are citizens supposed to take these warnings seriously, if his opponents return to business as usual as soon as the polls have closed? Joe Biden received Donald Trump in the White House like any other president-elect. Not a word about Trump's refusal to concede defeat in 2020 or the attempt by his supporters to overturn the result by force. In fact, if we look back to the presidential election of 2000 the danger ahead was already evident. It was figures who went on to become Trump's supporters, including Roger Smith, that organised a radical mob to aggressively obstruct the recount in Florida. Instead of opposing the mob on the streets – if only to give moral support to the volunteers and officials and produce good television footage – Democrats relied entirely on their lawyers and accepted the defeat handed down by the courts.

Of course that is the decent thing to do in a democracy, and vital for the survival of the institutions. However, insisting that »when they go low, we go high« (Michelle Obama) may be morally right but it is political suicide if your opponent is no longer playing by the rules. For example, when Republicans manipulate constituency boundaries to their advantage (»gerrymandering«), Democrats have to do the same when they can. Or, as presidential immunity applies not just to Trump but all presidents, might that not allow something to be done to protect the democratic institutions (even if that would mean departing from established practice)?

In other words, democracy will not be saved by rule of law alone. That does not mean that we should exclude the possibility of seeking to ban certain parties (as would be possible in Germany) or employing intelligence methods, prosecutions, entry bans or even requiring the registration of »foreign agents« (even if that starts sounding rather authoritarian). But it does mean that political mobilisation will always be decisive – only under new and harsher conditions. Americans say, »Don't bring a knife to a gunfight.« We need to take that message to heart and employ our opponents' own weapons against them.

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