

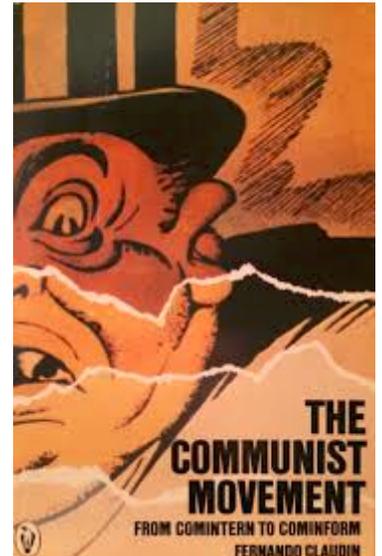
Is 'Populist International' Undermining Western Democracy?

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Europe's populists share ideas and ideology, friends and funders, [notes analyst Anne Applebaum](#). They cross borders to appear at one another's rallies. They have deep contacts in Russia — they often use Russian disinformation — as well as friends in other authoritarian states, [she writes for The Washington Post](#).

They despise the West and seek to undermine Western institutions. They think of themselves as a revolutionary avant-garde just like, once upon a time, the Communist International, or Comintern, the Soviet-backed organization that linked communist parties around Europe and the world, adds Applebaum, a board member of the [National Endowment for Democracy](#):

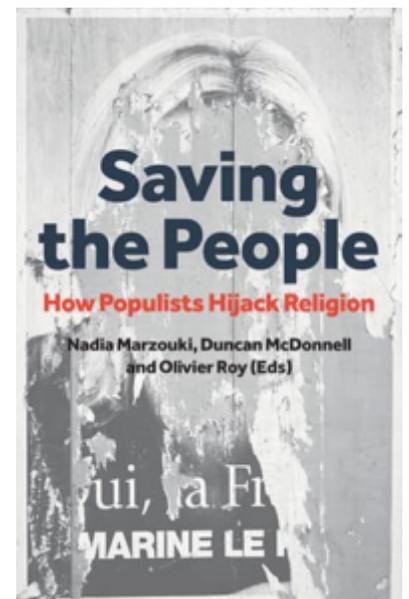
Now, of course, they are not Soviet-backed, and they are not communist. But this loose group of parties and politicians — Austria's Freedom Party, the Dutch Party for Freedom, the UK Independence Party, Hungary's Fidesz, Poland's Law and Justice, Donald Trump — have made themselves into a global movement of "anti-globalists." Meet the "Populist International": Whoever wins the U.S. election Tuesday, its influence is here to stay.



In *Saving the People: How Populists Hijack Religion*, their [exploration](#) of how far-right parties in Europe have seized on religion as part of a renewed nationalistic narrative, Professors Nadia Marzouki, Duncan McDonnell and Olivier Roy show how Europe's populists have come to identify a supposed "Islamisation" of the continent as its new existential threat, [notes Anne-Sylvaine Chassany](#).

In Europe, which has undergone a long process of secularisation, defining Islam as a prime target has involved rediscovering the continent's Christian roots and traditions — but not its values — as an identity marker, she [writes for The Financial Times](#):

Their analysis comes as Europe grapples with [homegrown](#) Islamist terror, radicalisation and growing gender segregation in deprived immigrant neighbourhoods, as well as the arrival of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria and Africa. This has coincided with rising electoral gains for European populists: the [Fidesz](#) party governs in Hungary; the Law and Justice party in Poland; French National Front leader Marine Le Pen [is predicted to qualify](#) for the second ballot of the presidential run-off in May and the Dutch Party for Freedom [led by Geert Wilders](#) is expected to post a strong showing in general elections in March.

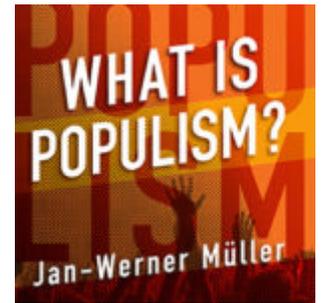


But while populism is an important concept to understand contemporary politics in many democracies around the world, it tells only part of the story, [argues Cas Mudde](#), Associate Professor in the School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA) at the University of Georgia and Researcher at the Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX) at the University of Oslo.

"This is because [populism is a so-called 'thin' ideology](#), which is almost always combined with one or more other ideologies when political actors are successful," he writes. "Moreover, the success of populist actors, like all political actors, is dependent upon the cultural and political system they operate in (and rarely have helped shape before they became successful)."

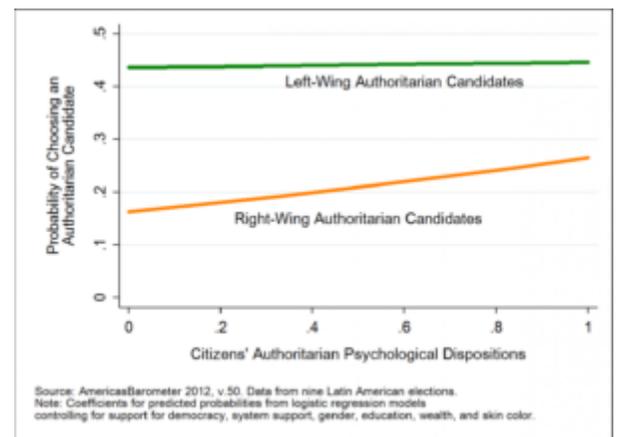
The relative significance of the [cultural and economic factors underpinning](#) populism is the subject of a paper, “Trump, Brexit, and the rise of populism: economic have-nots and cultural backlash”, [published in August](#) by Ronald F. Inglehart, professor of political science at the [University of Michigan](#), and Pippa Norris, Paul F. McGuire professor of comparative politics at the Harvard Kennedy School. [John Morgan writes for The Times Higher Education Supplement](#):

Inglehart and Norris characterise populism as expressing “resentment of existing authorities, whether big business, big banks, multinational corporations, media pundits, elected politicians and government officials, intellectual elites and scientific experts, and the arrogant and privileged rich”. The sentiment favours “mono-culturalism over multiculturalism, national self-interest over international cooperation and development aid, closed borders over the free flow of peoples, ideas, labour and capital, and traditionalism over progressive and liberal social values”.



People with authoritarian psychological dispositions are more likely to support right-wing authoritarian candidates — such as Guatemala’s Otto Pérez Molina or Peru’s Keiko Fujimori, [according to Amy Erica Smith](#), currently a visiting fellow at the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame, and [Mollie Cohen](#), a research fellow at the Latin American Public Opinion Project at Vanderbilt University:

Individuals’ probability of voting for a right-wing authoritarian candidate rises by about 10 percentage points as their level of authoritarianism moves from lowest to the highest. Interestingly, authoritarianism is also correlated with support for right-leaning candidates who are not authoritarian in some countries, including Uruguay and Costa Rica.



“But here’s the surprise: Having an authoritarian psychological disposition is *not* correlated with support for leftist authoritarians — for instance, Chávez, Latin America’s most famous authoritarian leader in the 2000s,” they [write for The Washington Post’s Monkey Cage](#). RTWT

Stability and democracy in Europe will hold fast against populism, argues historian Margaret MacMillan. Respect for the rule of law will overcome any chance of a return to the Weimar era, [she writes for The FT](#):

History offers warnings and reassurance. It is true that 2016 has not been a good year for Europe but that will not necessarily lead to a replay of the 1930s. Democracy and respect for the rule of law are more firmly established and across more of Europe. We should remember that our societies have shown the capacity to reform and rebuild themselves. Think of how different the Germany of today is from the one of the 1930s. So we should hope European democracy can nod its head yet keep it firmly in place.



Conservatism and populism are not the same thing, philosophically or temperamentally, [Peter Wehner argues in Commentary](#):

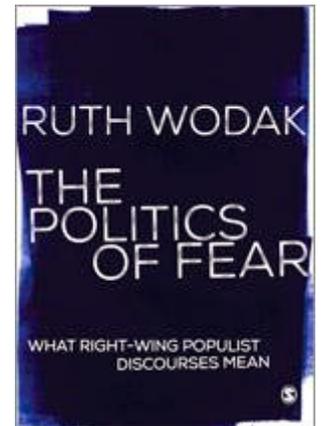
Populism has been defined as “an ideology which pits a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous ‘others’ who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of

their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice.” It has different manifestations, some more responsible and some less, but resentment is often a key ingredient in populism. It’s also a movement that’s been historically susceptible to demagogues, [a concern held by philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to the American founders.](#))

‘The arrogance of ignorance’

All populist parties use anti-expert rhetoric as one of their central tactics, argues Ruth Wodak, emeritus distinguished professor of discourse studies at [Lancaster University](#) and author of [The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean](#) (2015), [Morgan adds](#):

Their anti-elitist position allows populist parties to frame themselves as the ones who “present the voice of ‘the people’”, she says, and anti-expert rhetoric is an integral part of this stance. “They claim that ‘the people’ know what is right and wrong just intuitively... This appeal to common sense and against knowledge is very apparent and important in their ideology. I label that in my book ‘the arrogance of ignorance’,” she says.



Is Populism Undermining Western Democracy?

With Moderator Sylke Tempel, Editor-in-Chief of *Internationale Politik* and *Berlin Policy Journal*, Harvard University political theorist [Yascha Mounk](#) [a recent contributor to the [NED's Journal of Democracy](#)], *Die Welt* columnist Alan Posener, and German Marshall Fund Transatlantic Fellow Timo Lochocki will discuss the extent to which populism is endangering Western democracy, or renewing it.