THE "POPULIST MOMENT" AND THE LIBERAL (DIS-)

ORDER

Introduction

In the debate over the rise of the populist Right, the phenomenon has not only been characterized as having been born out of historical fascism[1] or as a reaction to contemporary cultural anxieties and social insecurities generated by globalized neo-liberal agendas.[2] It has also been viewed as a systemic corrective of a politics that has become too distant from the people[3]—or in Cas Mudde's words, "illiberal democratic response to undemocratic liberalism."[4] Given these conflicting interpretations, it is not surprising that populism, with its anti-establishment stance, is sometimes described as holding both a hostile and friendly relationship with democracy.[5] Exclusivist notions of what constitutes the demos have been juxtaposed against those that highlight the redemptive potential of democracy, whereby "the people" should decide their own future through a direct expression of their sovereign will.[6] The association of the Radical Right with populism[7]—which has distinct left-wing

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[1] Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).

[2] See Piero Ignazi, *The Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[3] Cas Mudde, "The problem with populism," *The Guardian*, 17 February 2015.

[4] See, for example, the recent sympathetic account by Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin, *National Populism: The Revolt against Liberal Democarcy* (London: Penquin, 2018).

[5] Cas Mudde and Christóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 18–20.

[6] Margaret Canovan, "Trust the people! Populism an the two faces of democracy," *Political Studies*, 47,1 (1999), 2–16.

[7] On populism, see Mudde, *The Populist Radical Right*: *A Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017); Mudde and Kaltwasser *Populism;* Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History*; Kirk A. Hawkins, Ryan E. Carlin, Levente Littvay, and Christóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (eds.), *The Ideational Approach to Populism: Concept, Theory, and Analysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019); Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism*? (Philadelphia: University of Pensylvania, 2016); Nadia Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured: Opinion, Truth, and the People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Style, and Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); John B. Judis, *The Populist Explosion*: *How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics* (New York: Columbia Global Report, 2016); Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left*

historical trajectories of its own—is another complicating factor. Some scholars, such as Mudde and Christóbal Kaltwasser, argue that populism represents a "thin ideology"[8]—a concept borrowed from Michael Freeden—affiliated with a "host ideology," which can be situated either on the Left and Right. Such a malleable definition, which suggests an organized, if fleeting, response to different political conditions, runs the risks of stripping the concept of historical dimensions and conceptual genealogies.[9] Since left-wing and right-wing forms of populism are often antithetical, their conflation leaves out crucial ideological distinctions. The radical Left's critique of social inequalities and of the identification of liberalism with democracy is certainly based on anti-elitist discourses.[10] But while the far-right's criticism of elites in the name of the people can, in part, be seen as a reaction to anti-democratic technocracy, it is more about anti-politics based on ethno-nationalism and social and cultural conservatism. For this reason, some scholars, such as Jacques Rancière, are reluctant to use the populist label on the grounds that it blends critical left-wing appraisals of neoliberalism with right-wing racist traditions.[11] To him, the moralistic denunciation of populism in all its formations boils down to an elitist attempt to downplay popular democratic expressions. Given the widespread use of the term, it may be futile to discard it. Yet, the lack of definitional rigor is a constant

Populism (London and New York: Verso, 2018); Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin, *National Populism*: *The Revolt against Liberal Democracy*.

[8] See Ben Stanley, "The thin ideology of populism,"*Journal of Political Ideologies,* 13, 1 (2008), 95–110; Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition,* 39 (2004), 542–563; Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso Books, 2005); Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*: *A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); idem, "Ideology and Political Theory," *Journal of Political Ideologies,* 11 (2006), 3–22.

[9] See Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History*, p. 130.

[10] Ibid, p. 134.

[11] Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2006), pp. 79–80.

reminder, not only to take into account the ambivalent history of populism as a political category but also how it has been practiced.

In this paper, I explore European right-wing populism—as an ideology and party formation—through a transnational and comparative lens. Historically, the populist Right should be seen as part of a tradition that dates back to the two World Wars and the Cold War period.[12] Rooted in different political milieus[13]—whether as part of "legacy fascism," neo-fascism or neo-liberal anti-tax revolts—it has taken on several forms.[14] I argue here that there are functional links between the contemporary and interwar Radical Right.[15] Despite their different position toward liberal democracy—with the former accepting it and the latter rejecting it—they share anti-elitist, ethno-nationalist and traditionalist social and cultural agendas. More important, however, is their behavior within political systems. While the populists do not use violence, as the fascists did, they are willing to forge alliances with conservative elites to satisfy their power and government aspirations.[16]

I also seek to show that the party platforms of European Radical Right—except for those that are overtly associated with fascist roots or ideology, such as the Golden Dawn in Greece—possess common characteristics, which not only underscore their transnational reach but also their identification with a generic party family. This is particularly reflected in their ideological emphasis on ethnic exclusion, welfare

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[12] Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History*.

[13] Daphne Halikiopoulou and Sofia Vasilopoulou, "Support for the Far Right in the 2014 European Parliament Elections: A Comparative Perspective," *The Political Quarterly,* 85, 3 (2014), 286.

[14] Richard Griffiths, *Fascism* (London: Continuum, 2006), 150–152.

[15] See Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History*, p. 251.

[16] See Martin Blinkhorn (ed.), *Fascists and conservatives. The radical right and the establishment in twentieth-century Europe* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990); idem, *Fascism and the right in Europe, 1918–1945* (London: Longmans, 2000).

chauvinism, and cultural conservativism. Finally, while competing with the right-wing populists for votes, Northern and Western European conservative parties have, with few important exceptions—notably, Germany, France, and Sweden—facilitated the Radical Right's acceptance into the political mainstream as part of a governing strategy. What needs to be stressed, however, is that this collaboration does not follow a single pattern. Some conservative parties, especially those in the Nordic countries, are not willing to go as far as others in neutralizing the populist Right either through semi-authoritarian rule, as is the case in Hungary and Poland, or through what may termed programmatic parroting when it comes to Austria on issues, such as immigration and Islam.

A " Crisis of Representation": The Links between Populism and Democracy

While theorists on populism have defined the concept in different ways, they usually describe it in terms of an antagonistic relationship between the "people" and elites. Mudde and Kaltwasser argue that, like other ideologies, such as liberalism, nationalism or socialism, populism can have positive or negative effects: as a potential corrective and threat to democracy, depending on the political context.[17] As a democratizing force, it defends the principle of popular sovereignty with the aim of empowering groups that that do not feel represented by the political establishment. On the other hand, it can also lead to authoritarian aberrations and conflict with

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[17] Ibid, p. 79.

liberal democracy because of its rejection of pluralism, including minority rights.[18] Thus, to counter the argument that their definition of populism is too broad and elastic, Mudde and Kaltwasser stress that what constitutes its opposition is not only elitism but also pluralism, which contains a variety of partly overlapping social groups with different ideas and interests.

Jan-Werner Müller, who primarily focuses on the right-wing variant of populism, dismisses its redemptive possibilities and sees it as being fundamentally antithetical to democracy. Right-wing populists, he argues, seek to identify with the "people" in an attempt to represent it in an exclusive way. Equating liberal democracy with democracy, he stresses that populism can never improve a political system that has become too elite-driven. Thus, the populist distinction between "the pure people" and "corrupt elite" involves a particular moralistic imagination of politics. The "people" do not exist in the real world, for they are an imaginary construct created for anti-democratic purposes. While Müller concedes that the practice of liberal democracy leaves much to be desired in some countries, it should be defended against populism's false promises of democratic renewal.[19] By adopting such a moralistic and defensive stance, he does not engage with critical democratic theorists, such as Yannis Stavrakakis and Anton Jäger, who argue that—in an age of increasing social inequalities and technocracy—elites are mostly responsible for divorcing liberalism from democracy and, by default, creating the conditions for

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[18] Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism,* pp. 18–20.
[19] Müller, *What is Populism?* pp. 6, 10–11, 76.

current the rise of the populist Right.[20] Indeed, the failure of political elites before and after the financial crisis of 2008 can, at lest, partly explain the erosion of trust in liberal-democratic institutions.

Yet, like Müller, Nadia Urbinati has warned against the destructive tendency of populism—whether on the Right or Left—to make a democracy more intensely majoritarian and less liberal. To her, populism disfigures democratic institutions in ruinous ways, because it makes the dialectics between minority and majority opinions hard to manage.[21] She argues that a strategy embracing hegemonic politics, such as that proposed by left-wing theorist Ernesto Laclau, would be dangerously prone to becoming a vehicle for a reactionary Caesarism that uses populism to make itself victorious.[22] If successful, it could lead to an exit from representative and constitutional democracy. Instead, she emphasizes the key role of "intermediary bodies" in liberal democracies, which are capable of communicating political demands from a party base to an elite without the direct embodiment put forward by populist demagogues or the unrestrained demophobia of elitist technocrats.[23]

All these accounts stress that the populists want to bypass representational institutional mechanisms, including parliamentary procedures, to narrow the distance between the people and their representatives, for example, through plebiscites, and to weaken the division of powers. Yet, the dominant scholarly tendency to define populism exclusively in "ideational" terms—as a discourse, an ideology, or a world-

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[20] See Yannis Stavrakakis and Anton Jäger,"Accomplishments and limitations of the 'new' mainstream in contemporary populism studies," *European Journal of Social Studies*, 21, 4 (2018), 547–565.

[21] Nadia Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured: Opinion, Truth, and the People*, p. 149.

[22] Ibid, pp. 137, 153.

[23] Urbinati, "A revolt against intermediary bodies," *Constellations* 22 (2015), 484–485.

view—is flawed because it does not pay enough attention to populist practices. The emphasis on populism's radical anti-elitism has not only tended to obscure its collaboration with conservative elites but also its functional roles within liberal democratic systems.

No matter how the Radical Right is defined, it has profited, in Europe, from a "dealignment" in liberal democratic systems or the dislocation between personal identities and political party affiliation. With the steep decline of Social Democracy and some "big tent" Center-Right parties—a trend that has been accompanied by the weakening of liberal parties—far-right parties have, in many countries, become the second or third largest political force. While the weakening of the moderate Left has opened up spaces for the radical Left as well as some Green parties, the cumulative effect of this political realignment has been the strengthening of the Right. Several explanations have been offered to explain the Left's retrenchment, such as the embracement of a globalist neo-liberal agenda in the decade before the 2008 financial crisis—as symbolized by the "Third Way"—and increasing detachment from the labor movement. It has enabled the populist Radical Right to make inroads into traditional left-wing voting territories and to woo traditional working class voters, especially after shifting their emphasis, in many instances, from neo-liberal policies toward the social state and by portraying foreigner workers as competitors in labor markets. In addition, right-wing populists have combined a pro-social stance with anti-elite and anti-immigrant rhetoric.

Chantal Mouffe argues that a "populist moment" has arrived, signaling the crisis of the neo-liberal hegemony established in the 1980s. Moreover, she predicts that the central axis of political conflict in the near future will be between right-wing populism and left-wing populism. To counter the surge of the Right, she proposes, in lieu with Laclau's theory, a Left populist strategy designed to establish a more democratic hegemonic formation. The experience of Thatcherism in Britain, she argues, shows that in European societies, it is possible to bring about a transformation of the existing order without destroying liberal democratic institutions.[24] Given the current weaknesses of the Left, it is hard to see how a populist strategy will provide it with the weapons needed to resist the Radical Right. But there is no doubt that right-wing populist electoral gains in Europe have to be seen within the context of broader societal trends, such as increased social inequalities stemming from neo-liberal globalization agendas—as symbolized by the Great Recession—and an "identitarian" reaction against multi-culturalism triggered by the recent immigrant influx.

Mixed Ideological Messages

The European right-wing populist parties have generally adopted a program that stresses a purist national past and cultural homogeneity, where historical myths—including a reification of the European welfare state, especially in the Nordic countries—play a major role in forging exclusivist identity projections. They also

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[24] See Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism,* pp. 6, 11, 36.

build on the idea of ethno-pluralism as a counter-narrative to multi-culturalism. Instead of focusing on "blood and soil," as the fascist parties did, the populists use mono-cultural arguments to drive home the need for preserving unique national characteristics. Different ethnic groups have to be kept separate on the essentialist ground that any "mixture" would lead to cultural decay. To some scholars, this argument is not part of a traditional racist discourse because ethno-pluralism does not have to be hierarchical or made up of "superior" or "inferior" ethnic groups.[25] But such an interpretation is misplaced. Apart from the anti-Islamic subtext, this ideological strand is clearly part of a racist tradition. "Separate but equal" was, for example, the standard refrain of those in the United States who sought to preserve a segregated South during the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s.

Programmatic similarities can also be found. Just like the interwar Radical Right, the contemporary far-right parties usually refuse to define themselves in terms of traditional right-wing/left-wing dichotomies. Their agenda is directed at marginalized groups in what Jens Rydgren terms a new "master frame," combining nativism with anti-establishment rhetoric.[26] Yet, most right-wing populist parties have rejected any overt association with historical racism or fascism on the grounds that it would diminish their political impact. There have certainly be flirtations with such a past. Matteo Salvini, the leader of the right-wing populist party, Lega, had no qualms—after becoming Interior Minister—about paraphrasing, in a tweet, one of

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[25] Gabriella Elgenius and Jens Rydgren, "Frames of nostalgia and belonging: the resurgence of ethno-nationalism in Sweden," *European Societies* (July 2018 online) DOI: 10.1080/14616696.2018.1494297.
[26] See Jens Rydgren, "Is extreme right-wing populism contagious? Explaining the emergence of a new party Family," *European Journal of Political Research*, 44 (2005), 413–443.

Mussolini's most well known phrases: "Many enemies, much honor." Within the German Alternative for Germany (AFD), there are elements that can be described as espousing a neo-fascist and anti-Semitic agenda. The Sweden Democrats have a neo-Nazi background and a tradition of interwar nostalgia. And Jobbik in Hungary has displayed anti-Roma and anti-Semitic tendencies, even if its leaders have tried to moderate its program in an effort to change its ultra-nationalist and xenophobic image.

This does not mean that all populist right-wing parties are secretly wedded to the past, for some want to steer clear from it. While being conservative and traditionalist on social issues, parties, such as the Austrian Freedom Party[27] and the Progress Party in Norway,[28] have espoused individualist liberal economic policies in contrast to the social corporatist and, in some cases, anti-capitalist rhetoric of the interwar Radical Right. Most of those parties most likely to be electorally successful in contemporary Europe are those that combine a nationalist ideology and conservative cultural values with social protection policies. Indeed, this has become the new Radical Right "winning formula" in contrast to the combination of neo-

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[27] Reinhard Heinisch and Kristina Hauser, „The mainstreaming of the Austrian Freedom Party: The more things change…,", in Tjitske Akkerman, Sarah L. de Lange and Matthijs Rooduijn, *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Europe: Into the mainstream?* (New York: Routledge, 2016) pp. 73–93.

[28] On the Progress Party, see Anders Ravik Jupsås, "The taming of the shrew: How the Progress Party (almost) became part of the mainstream," in Akkerman, de Lange and Rooduijn, *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Europe: Into the mainstream?* pp. 169–192; Elin Haugsgjerd Allern, "The Contemporary Relationship of 'New Left' and 'New Right' Parties with Interest Groups: Exceptional or Mainstream? The Case of Norway's Socialist Left and Progress Party," *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 36, 1 (2013), 67–90; Johan Bjerkem, "The Norwegian Progress Party: an established populist party," *European View*,15 (2016), 233–243; Anders Ravik Jupskås, "Persistence of Populism: The Norwegian Progress Party, 1973–2009" (Ph.D. thesis: University of Oslo, 2015).

liberalism and cultural traditionalism, which Anthony J. McGann and Herbert Kitschelt suggested in the 1990s.[29]

In his very restrictive interpretation of populist ideology, Jan-Werner Müller sidesteps its historical dimensions[30] and eschews explanatory factors, such as economic crises, crises of modernity or social dislocations. What is more, he not only subsumes all right-wing populist party formations under the same rubric; he makes no distinction between authoritarian leaders, such as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Victor Orbán. To counter such simplifications, it can be fruitful to analyze populism in a similar way that the interwar Right has been studied, that is, by paying more attention to what unites and differentiates radicals from conservatives. In Hungary, Orbán and his party the Hungarian Civic Union, Fidesz, have moved sharply to the Right, having borrowed heavily from Jobbik. Given his nationalist, natalist, and xenophobic agenda, it is possible that Orbán will eventually leave his traditional conservative base and side with the populists. But so far Orbán has pursued a hybrid strategy to enable him to stay in both camps. While courting right-wing populists, such as Salvini in Italy and Marine Le Pen in France, he is still aligned with conservative parties, including the mainstream Center-Right European People's Part (EPP) group in the European Parliament, even if his membership has been put on probation. Sebastian Kurz, the Austrian Chancellor, has also adopted core elements of the Freedom Party's agenda by putting anti-immigration, welfare chauvinism, and the fight against political Islam a priority. At the same time, he identifies himself with

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[29] See Anthony J. McGann and Herbert Kitschelt, *The New Radical Right in Europe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1995).
[30] See Müller, *What is Populism?*

the center-right conservative parties in the European Parliament. And in contrast to Orbán, he is firmly committed to the European project, having voiced criticism of the Hungarian government for undermining the independence of the judicial system. Thus, while the Conservative Right is perfectly capable of crossing ideological lines, it does not necessarily do so in unison.

Müller's argument that populist leaders are, generally, not interested in galvanizing and mobilizing the public is misleading, because it fails to take into account key ideological distinctions. Some authoritarian leaders, who do not rely on party structures but on the state, may seek to stifle democratic participation. But populist leaders—who have enthusiastically sought to work with right-wing authoritarian leaders with strong party ties—are bent on stimulating grass roots support. As Herbert Kitschelt put it, such movement-parties seek to combine activities within the arenas of formal democratic competition with extra-institutional mobilization.[31] Similarly, it makes little sense to dismiss sociological analyses of the populist electoral base, as Müller does, on the grounds that such parties tend to be catch-all-parties. Fascist and radical right parties attracted voters from all social strata in the 1930s, but not equally, as the many studies on the make-up of their membership and electoral base show.[32]

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[31] Herbert Kitschelt, "Movement parties," in Richard S. Katz and William Crotty (eds.), *Handbook of party politics* (London: Sage Publications, 2006), p. 280.
[32] On the social basis of fascists, see Thomas Childers, *The Nazi Voter: The Social Foundations of Fascism in Germany, 1919–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); Jürgen Falter, *Hitlers Wähler* (Munich: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1991); Michael H. Kater, *The Nazi Party: A Social Profile of Its Members and Leaders, 1919–1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); William Brustein, "The Political Geography of Belgian Fascism: the Case of Rexism," *American Sociological Review* 53 (1988), 939–50; Richard F. Hamilton, *Who Voted for Hitler?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Adrian Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power: Fascism in Italy, 1919–1929* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973); Paolo Fameti, "The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy and the Takeover of

The Radical and Conservative Right

The attempt by many populist parties to moderate their ethnically exclusivist message, has opened up possibilities for cooperation with other parties. Hence, accommodation has become the prevalent form of the relationship between European conservative and populist parties as practiced through government coalition agreements or ideological affinities. In some cases, however, the center-right has refrained, for ideological reasons, from entering into any type of collaboration with the Radical Right. And in yet other ones, conservatives can rule on their own or in cooperation with other centrist or, in some cases, Social Democratic parties. The Scandinavian populist parties in Europe have been the most successful in gaining acceptance by the other parties and being integrated into the political system. Moreover, they have become ruling partners of conservative parties in Denmark, Norway, and Finland. What this means is that liberal and centrist parties play a less important role as powerbrokers than in the past. Sweden is the anomaly: The liberal parties have decided to switch sides to support a Social Democratic minority government to maintain a cordon sanitaire vis-à-vis the populist Sweden Democrats. [33] At the same time, the right-wing populists compete with the conservative parties to

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the Fascist Dictatorship, 1919–1922," in Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (eds.), *Breakdown and Crisis of Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1979).

[33] On the Sweden Democrats see, Ov Cristian Norocel, "Populist radical right protectors of the folkhem: Welfare chauvinism in Sweden," *Critical Social Policy*, 36, 3 (2016),371–390; Gissur Ó Erlingsson, Kåre Vernbyb, and Richard Öhrvall, "The single-issue party thesis and the Sweden Democrats," *Acta Politica*, 49, 2 (2014), 196–216; Maria Oskarson and Marie Demker, "Room for Realignment: The Working Class Sympathy for Sweden Democrats," *Government and Opposition*, 50, 4 (2015) , 629–651; Niklas Bolin," A Loyal Rookie? The Sweden Democrats' First

become the second largest parties after the Social Democrats in the Scandinavian countries.[34] Similarly, in Austria, the Freedom Party has been part of the mainstream for some time, and is currently a junior partner in a coalition government with the conservative People's Party. And in Italy, the Lega, originally wanted to stick to its alliance with Silvio Berlusconi's conservative party before the latter agreed not to be included in a government to pave the way for the formation of a government coalition between Salvini's right-wing populist party and "left-wing" populists, the Five Star Movement.

In some countries, historical or ideological factors prevent any cooperation between conservatives and populists. In Germany, the Christian Democrats were forced to renew their coalition government with the Social Democrats, partly to prevent new elections, where the AfD could have improved on its new-found position as the third largest party in the German parliament. Given the shadow of the Nazi past, it will extremely difficult for the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) to warm up to any cooperation with the far-right; the more conservative sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU) is also adamantly against it, even if it has borrowed from the AfD's anti-immigration rhetoric. Needless to say, French President Emmanuel Macron, who won, decisively, in the presidential contest with Marine Le

Year in the European Parliament," *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, 2 (2015), 59–77; Gabriella Elgenius and Jens Rydgren,"The Sweden Democrats and the ethno-nationalist rhetoric of decay and betrayal," S*ociologisk Forskning*, 54, 4 (2017), 353–358; Ov Cristian Norocel, "'Give Us Back Sweden!'" A Feminist Reading of the (Re)Interpretations of the Folkhem Conceptual Metaphor in Swedish Radical Right Populist Discourse," *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 21, 1 (2013), 4–20.

[34] Even if the Finns have lost much support after splitting into two parties. On Finnish right-wing populism, see Niko Hatakka, "When logics of party politics and online activism collide: The populist Finns Party's identity under negotiation," *new media & society* 19,12 (2017), 2022–2038; Inari Sakki1, Eemeli Hakoköngäs, and Katarina Pettersson, "Past and Present Nationalist Political Rhetoric in Finland: Changes and Continuities," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 37, 2 (2018), 160–180; Àrpàd Welker, "Consolidation, Historiography and the Challenge of Populism in Finland," *European Review*, 21, 4 (2013), 489–500.

Pen, has continued the policy of his predecessors on the Conservative Right and the Socialist Left to refuse any collaboration with the far-right Rassemblement National or the Front National, as it used to be called.[35]

Other conservative parties, notably in countries such as Hungary and Poland, have refashioned themselves as semi-authoritarian right-wing parties, which have effectively managed to defeat the populist parties as ideological competitors. This applies especially to Fidesz, which retains its absolute majority in the Hungarian parliament and has forced Jobbik to seek ideological solace among weak opposition parties. In the Czech Republic, where Prime Minister Andrej Babiš has displayed semi-authoritarian tendencies, the right-wing populists are needed to prop up the government without playing a pivotal role because other small parties are also involved, including the Communists.

Thus, the success of the populist Right in many European countries—whether as part of governing coalitions or supporters of conservative governments—has allowed it to act, paradoxically, both as systemic destabilizers and stabilizers. On the one hand, it is a disrupting anti-elitist force, seeking to reverse mainstream policies on immigration, welfare, multiculturalism, and European integration. On the other, it is an accommodating political vehicle that is prepared to forge political alliances based on nationalist and traditionalist agendas.

Conclusion

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[35] Aurelien Mondon, "The Front National in the Twenty-First Century: From Pariah to Republican Democratic Contender," *Modern & Contemporary France*, 22, 3 (2014), 301–320.

Despite the resurgence of the Radical Right all over Europe, no populist party has managed to monopolize power or form a government of its own. While the populist parties have had to dilute their radical agendas in exchange for direct or indirect government responsibility,[36] they have managed to play a political agenda-setting role on issues such as immigration.[37] The willingness to enter into coalitions with other political forces undercuts the erroneous, but often repeated, claim that populists see all political competitors and elites as being illegitimate. Here a clear affinity can be detected between the present and the past. Mudde and Kaltwasser's argument that fascist regimes were elitist rather than populist because of their ideological emphasis on the leadership cult and racial policies is misguided.[38] Just like the populists, the fascists adopted an anti-elitist agenda, even it was compromised by their collaboration with elites. After coming to power in Germany and Italy, there was a fierce competition between the party and state, echoing an inbuilt tension between the old guard and the new, or "patrician" and "plebeian" elements. This helps explain why conservatives usually cooperate with the radical right parties out of necessity, not because of any close political, cultural or social affinity. From a European regional angle, this alliance is currently most clearly discernible in Scandinavia, but it includes other countries, such as Austria.

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[36]Ann-Cathrine Jungar and Anders Ravik Jupskås, "Populist Radical Right in the Nordic Region: A New and Distinct Party Family?" *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 37, 3 (2014), 215–238.
[37] See Linnéa Lindsköld, "Contradicting Cultural Policy: A Comparative Study of the Cultural Policy of the Scandinavian Radical Right, *Nordisk kulturpolitisk tidskrift*, 1 (August 2015), 8–26.
[38] See Mude and Kaltwasser, *Populism*, p. 33.

Right-wing populism is not about the revival of historical fascism. But it cannot either be defined exclusively as a new phenomenon associated with the establishment of a specific party formation—in the 1970s—which was rooted in anti-tax revolts and neo-liberal economic agendas. As Roger Griffin pointed out some time ago, the rejection of multiculturalism by the populist parties, their longing for "purity, their nostalgia for a mythical world of racial homogeneity" and for "clearly demarcated boundaries of cultural differentiation," and their use of history represent a repackaged version of the same basic myth.[39] Thus, the current "populist moment"—which poses a challenge to the liberal order—evokes a memory, a historical trace, not only with respect to past right–wing ideologies but, more importantly, to practices. Again, some conservative parties have adopted key anti-liberal ideological elements of the Radical Right's agenda as a way of responding to political competition. The open question is whether it will be the populists or the conservatives who will, in the end, claim victory in this power struggle.

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[39] Roger Griffin, "Interregnum or endgame? The radical right in the 'post-fascist' era," *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 5, 2 (2000), 163–178.