

## NAVIGATING IMPACT AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS OF POPULISM IN WESTERN EUROPE

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### INTRODUCTION

The common denominator of nationalist populist European leaders is that EU should be less united. Since 2009 Euro crisis and 2015 migrant crisis, right-wing populist movements have increased in strength and number. They all accuse Brussels of acting as a dictator. Ironically, the populist parties do participate in democratic election for Brussels-based EU parliament. They often repeat a conspiracy that mainstream leaders want to replace Europeans with low paid migrants. They may say some provocative or even hateful things but their language and ideas are consistent all across Europe and they are clearly effective.

Pollsters predict that these eurosceptic parties will see a significant rise in votes in the European election. Ironically, it's the Eurosceptic parties that seem to be doing the best job building pan-European politics.

The rising tendency of populism also has its demonstration effects. A review of populism wave across several countries in Europe perhaps reveals that the populism is being intentionally exported or specific actors undertake efforts to boost the electoral fortunes of populist parties. Brietbart News Network is one such prominent platform. It is an alt-right media company that was formerly headed by White House advisor Steve Bannon. Additionally, leaders of Europe's far-right parties have strengthened ties among themselves.

Eurocentric rhetoric

The phenomenal growth of populist parties would not have been materialized without utilization of money and instruments made available by EU. Consequently, European populism has now entered

European parliament and is using the highest platform in the continent for projecting Eurosceptic rhetoric and express its intention to destroy European Union. The rise of Eurosceptic populist forces would not have been possible without role of EU funds. In 2016, Marine Le Pen's party received about 1.5 million Euros for covering European political agenda related expenses. Similarly, 1.4 million Euros was received by UKIP led Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy. The funds were allocated for covering expenses related to European legislative work. However, repeated corruption cases emerged about the fraudulent use of funds by UKIP members. Marine Le Pen was involved in legal scandal over misuse of parliamentary funds. Interestingly, the summit of populist "patriotic leaders" held in January 2017 to announce the upcoming political assault in various elections was also paid using European funds.

Changing Face of European Politics

For European populist forces, the Strasbourg chamber of European parliament is TV studio for propagating their viewpoint rather than a workplace for legislative work. Generally, majority of the MEPs in far-right groups have poor parliamentary record and legislation formulation participation.<sup>1</sup> However, their ability to capitalize on their statements in the chamber – which is possible through regulations allowing participation of all parliamentary groups in

<sup>1</sup> Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Carsten Reinemann, Jesper Stromback, and Claes De Vreese,

eds. Populist political communication in Europe. Routledge, 2016.

the debates – have helped them in successfully conveying their pro/anti-Europe ideological focus.<sup>2</sup> Emergence as Important Players in National Politics Through European Parliament and the Council of the EU, many populist forces have been able to boost their political careers in their respective countries.<sup>3</sup> The emergence of populist parties as an alternative has made a mark on national politics and threatened European construction. A case in point is UKIP. The Eurosceptic party was able to drag British Conservatives to call for Brexit referendum without a single seat in British parliament.<sup>4</sup>

#### Blaming EU

The infrastructure of European construction is responsible for making EU a scapegoat for multiple crises.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, Brussels has faced brunt of citizens' discontent about Europe's lack of response towards migration crisis, rise of populism and social inequalities.<sup>6</sup> The blame game on Brussels reflects a new dimension of national governments in using abstract, depersonalized notion of blame Brussels for unpopular measures.<sup>7</sup> In other words, EU itself has proved arsenal for populist leaders to damage the regional institution from within.<sup>8</sup>

#### Increasing Convergence

European populists want the return of borders, closing immigration and flow of free trade.<sup>9</sup> They are hostile to all forms of multilateralism. This convergence is visibly on topics like immigration.<sup>10</sup>

#### Multipolarity without multilateralism

The populist phenomenon has affected nearly every part of the world. However, it has failed to produce same result everywhere in terms of foreign policy.<sup>11</sup> In the case of United States and Europe, despite being not in power, populists have been to affect both agenda and content of foreign policies.<sup>12</sup> It has given birth to multi-polarity without multilateralism.<sup>13</sup> Populist foreign policies expressed concern about eroding sovereignty.<sup>14</sup>

Centre-right parties adopting more extreme positions  
The emergence of populism in Western Europe has led to the rising competition on the far-right. Consequently, it has contributed in adoption of more extreme positions on a number of issues including immigration.<sup>15</sup> A case in point is embracement of young and radical leaders by centre-rights parties in

<sup>2</sup> Eckart Woertz, "POPULISM IN EUROPE: FROM SYMPTOM TO ALTERNATIVE?," Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, last modified 2017, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Teun Pauwels, *Populism in Western Europe: Comparing Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands*. Routledge, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Eckart Woertz, "POPULISM IN EUROPE: FROM SYMPTOM TO ALTERNATIVE?," Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, last modified 2017, 24.

<sup>5</sup> Matthijs Rooduijn and Tjitske Akkerman. "Flank attacks: Populism and left-right radicalism in Western Europe." *Party Politics* 23, no. 3 (2017): 193-204.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Učeň, "Parties, populism, and anti-establishment politics in East Central Europe." *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 27, no. 1 (2007): 49-62.

<sup>7</sup> Ulrike M. Vieten, and Scott Poynting. "Contemporary far-right racist populism in Europe." (2016): 533-540.

<sup>8</sup> Giuliano Bobba, and Guido Legnante. "A breeding ground for populist political communication." *Populist political communication in Europe* (2017): 221-234.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Taggart, "Populism in Western Europe." In *The Oxford handbook of populism*. 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Ruth Wodak, Majid KhosraviNik, and Brigitte Mral, eds. *Right-wing populism in Europe: Politics and discourse*. A&C Black, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Jens Rydgren, "Radical right-wing parties in Europe: What's populism got to do with it?." *Journal of Language and Politics* 16, no. 4 (2017): 485-496.

<sup>12</sup> Steve Corbett, "The social consequences of Brexit for the UK and Europe: Euroscepticism, populism, nationalism, and societal division." *The International Journal of Social Quality* 6, no. 1 (2016): 11-31.

<sup>13</sup> Hans-Georg Betz. *Radical right-wing populism in Western Europe*. Springer, 1994; Maurits J. Meijers, and Andrej Zaslove. "Measuring populism in political parties: appraisal of a new approach." *Comparative Political Studies* (2020): 0010414020938081.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Taggart, "Populism and representative politics in contemporary Europe." *Journal of political ideologies* 9, no. 3 (2004): 269-288.

<sup>15</sup> Kees Brants and Philip Van Praag, "Signs of media logic half a century of political communication in the Netherlands." *Javnost-the public* 13, no. 1 (2006): 25-40.

both Austria and France.<sup>16</sup> Similar move is also expected in Germany.<sup>17</sup>

Straining the tradition of traditional governments

The rise of populists in Western Europe has significantly strained the tradition of coalition government in many countries. As a result, strong presence of populist parties has made it impossible for coalition based governments to gain a governing majority.<sup>18</sup> In such scenarios, the failure to form a government appear to be the only alternative.<sup>19</sup> This trend will manifest more prominently in months and years to such an extent that either populist parties lose significance or gain enough majority to form their respective governments.<sup>20</sup>

Right Wing Europe

Since the turn of the century, Europe is becoming more right wing.<sup>21</sup> Since the turn of the century, the notion of globalism is receding.<sup>22</sup> The 2016 American presidential election was the outlier. Populist sentiments have been building over time. The success of UKIP and other related parties point out the fact that populism may be a long-term reality. Nearly all of Europe has experienced a growth in right-wing sentiments.

Brexit

Brexit is a classical case study which point out the fact that populist parties do not need to have

sufficient vote bank to exert influence over political landscape.<sup>23</sup> In Britain, the UKIP secured single seat during May 2015 general election. However, its populist rhetoric was instrumental in fuelling rabid anti-European and anti-immigration sentiments.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, Conservatives surrendered themselves to this populist hate-filled rhetoric to call the EU Brexit referendum. The holding of referendum and its subsequent result of parting with EU instigated profound and catastrophic consequences both at home and abroad.<sup>25</sup> These consequences include Britain's messy departure from the EU, resignation of David Cameron and Theresa May as British Prime Ministers, Labour leadership challenges, increasing prospects of UK's disintegration as a unitary state, deep uncertainty in financial markets, rise of anti-immigrant narrative and calls for Brexit-like referendums by populist parties in France, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark and elsewhere.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile, Brexit also helps in understanding how UKIP and other populist movements in Europe were able to galvanize support including forcing Conservative party leader, David Cameron, to offer referendum on the future relationship of Britain with EU in order to appease Euro-skeptics within

<sup>16</sup> Ruth Wodak and Michał Krzyżanowski, "Right-wing populism in Europe & USA: Contesting politics & discourse beyond 'Orbanism' and 'Trumpism'." *Journal of Language and Politics* 16, no. 4 (2017): 471-484.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Eiermann, Yascha Mounk, and Limor Gultchin. "European populism: Trends, threats and future prospects." *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change* 29 (2017).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Gintaras Aleknonis and Renata Matkevičienė. "Populism in Lithuania: defining the research tradition." *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics* 9, no. 1 (2016): 26-48.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Eiermann, Yascha Mounk, and Limor Gultchin. "European populism: Trends, threats and future prospects." *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change* 29 (2017).

<sup>21</sup> Sarah Engler, Bartek Pytlas, and Kevin Deegan-Krause. "Assessing the diversity of anti-establishment and populist politics in Central and

Eastern Europe." *West European Politics* 42, no. 6 (2019).

<sup>22</sup> Bruce Pilbeam, "Eurabian nightmares: American conservative discourses and the Islamisation of Europe." *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 9, no. 2 (2011): 151-171.

<sup>23</sup> Harold D. Clarke, Matthew J. Goodwin, Matthew Goodwin, and Paul Whiteley. *Brexit*. Cambridge University Press, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Kai-Olaf Lang. "Populism in Central and eastern Europe-A Threat to Democracy or just Political Folklore?." *Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs* 6, no. 01 (2005): 6-16.

<sup>25</sup> Stefan Rummens, "Populism as a threat to liberal democracy." In *The Oxford handbook of populism*. 2017.

<sup>26</sup> European Council on Foreign Relations. 2016. *The World According to Europe's Insurgent Parties*. London: European Council on Foreign Relations. [www.ecfr.eu](http://www.ecfr.eu)

Cameron's party.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, Boris Johnson followed a cynical but failed strategy for 'Leave' campaign in an unsuccessful attempt.<sup>28</sup> Other key factors were stoking of euro-skepticism, miscalculation by Leave voters of Brexit's impact and capacity to mobilize protest voting.

In leading up to Brexit, British public viewed relationship with EU beneficially in economic terms.<sup>29</sup> However, fears were expressed over its cultural consequences.<sup>30</sup> However, Leave campaign rhetoric was able to make serious impact because it harkens back nostalgically to the glorious past.

During that time period, British parliament was sovereign. The society was predominantly white Anglo-Saxon.<sup>31</sup> While British empire was in declining phase, Britain remained a major economic and military power.<sup>32</sup> Similar narratives along the lines of glory past are echoed by Marine Le Pen, Geert Wilders, Donald Trump and other populist leaders.<sup>33</sup> The notion of glorious past appeals more to older citizens.

The Brexit referendum triggered rise of populism.<sup>34</sup> It pointed out the desire to regain control of immigration and reclaim national sovereignty. Brexit was largely driven by immigration concerns. Immigration does not generally have immediate cause and effect. People gradually understand the

transformation taking place due to immigration by observing the change in culture and character of the place they live irrespective of economic factor.

The economic aspect of Brexit was largely outcome of Great Recession as observed across other Western countries. In the UK, the commonality of the Great Recession was add on with rising immigration, particularly from Eastern Europe.<sup>35</sup> Although British economy absorbed new immigrants and grew faster than most of the rest of Europe, however, the coincidence of Great Recession with rising levels of immigration has made the perception that it is bad for economy.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to economic dimension, there is a cultural dimension of Brexit. People seem unconformable with the evolving cultural change. Although cultural transformation may not have seriously impacted Brexit result but was definitely a factor.<sup>37</sup> Despite being out of Schengen area, Britain exercised great control over non-EU migration.<sup>38</sup> However, Brexit campaign revolved around the narrative over refugee crisis, which impacted other European countries.

<sup>27</sup> Messina, Anthony M. "The Not So Silent Revolution Postwar Migration to Western Europe." *World Politics* 49, no. 1 (1996): 130-154.

<sup>28</sup> Matt Golder, "Explaining variation in the success of extreme right parties in Western Europe." *Comparative political studies* 36, no. 4 (2003): 432-466.

<sup>29</sup> Jason Matthew Smith, "Does crime pay? Issue ownership, political opportunity, and the populist right in Western Europe." *Comparative Political Studies* 43, no. 11 (2010): 1471-1498.

<sup>30</sup> John Curtice, 'A Question of Culture or Economics? Public Attitudes to the European Union in Britain.' *Political Quarterly* 87, no. 2 (2015): 209-218.

<sup>31</sup> Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Carsten Reinemann, Jesper Stromback, and Claes De Vreese, eds. *Populist political communication in Europe*. Routledge, 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Hans-George Betz. "The new politics of resentment: radical right-wing populist parties in Western Europe." *Comparative politics* (1993): 413-427.

<sup>33</sup> Reinhard Heinisch, Christina Holtz-Bacha, and Oscar Mazzoleni, eds. *Political populism*. Nomos eLibrary, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Ruth Wodak and Michał Krzyżanowski. "Right-wing populism in Europe & USA: Contesting politics & discourse beyond 'Orbanism' and 'Trumpism'." *Journal of Language and Politics* 16, no. 4 (2017): 471-484.

<sup>35</sup> Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Carsten Reinemann, Jesper Stromback, and Claes De Vreese, eds. *Populist political communication in Europe*. Routledge, 2016.

<sup>36</sup> James McBride, "What Brexit Reveals About Rising Populism," Council on Foreign Relations, last modified June 29, 2016, <https://www.cfr.org/interview/what-brexit-reveals-about-rising-populism>.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Carsten Reinemann, Jesper Stromback, and Claes De Vreese, eds. *Populist political communication in Europe*. Routledge, 2016.

The narrative implies the loss of control over who is coming to the country (loss of sovereignty).<sup>39</sup> This is where anti-immigration arguments start dominating economic arguments.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, perceptions are developed that radical measures are needed to reassert control.<sup>41</sup> The crisis has neither impacted nor influenced immigration flows towards Britain.<sup>42</sup> However, the country has no control over direct immigration flow from Eastern Europe.<sup>43</sup> On nationalism, it is observed that mostly old white voters broadly support nationalism in UK. This is because they perceive themselves to be on the losing end of globalization.<sup>44</sup> The disruption in job landscape is due to multiple factors including technology, global economic competition etc.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, British labor markets are more flexible in Europe. It is easy to hire and fire people in Britain.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, social safety net in Britain is weaker than most European countries. In a way, UK is more similar to USA in the employment landscape than rest of Europe.

There is far reaching concerns that liberal order based system is in crisis mode.<sup>47</sup> However, little efforts have been undertaken to understand the particular nature and reasons for this crisis.<sup>48</sup> Currently, the crisis faced by the liberal order is viewed through the following prisms:

- The rise of populism
- Democratic deconsolidation
- Hollowing out of democracy

Scholars, pundits and analysts have been debating about the prospects and future direction of EU integration.<sup>49</sup> Some analysts continue to predict to breakup of both Eurozone and EU by arguing that both projects are damaged to a certain extent that they are beyond repair or redemption.<sup>50</sup>

#### Digital Technology

The contribution of digital technology in weakening the democratic foundations of European Union remains questionable.<sup>51</sup> Despite over-whiningly research studies pointing towards the increasing role of digital technology in weakening democracy across

<sup>39</sup> Jamie Bartlett, Jonathan Birdwell, Péter Krekó, Jack Benfield, and Gabor Gyori. "Populism in Europe: Hungary." (2012).

<sup>40</sup> Matt Golder, "Explaining variation in the success of extreme right parties in Western Europe." *Comparative political studies* 36, no. 4 (2003): 432-466; Paul Blokker. "Populism as a constitutional project." *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 17, no. 2 (2019): 536-553.

<sup>41</sup> James McBride, "What Brexit Reveals About Rising Populism," Council on Foreign Relations, last modified June 29, 2016, <https://www.cfr.org/interview/what-brexit-reveals-about-rising-populism>;

<sup>42</sup> Jamie Bartlett, Jonathan Birdwell, Péter Krekó, Jack Benfield, and Gabor Gyori, "Populism in Europe: Hungary." (2012).

<sup>43</sup> James McBride, "What Brexit Reveals About Rising Populism," Council on Foreign Relations, last modified June 29, 2016, <https://www.cfr.org/interview/what-brexit-reveals-about-rising-populism>

<sup>44</sup> Samantha Smith and Carroll Doherty, "A divide between college, non-college Republicans," Fact Tank, last modified March 1, 2016, [pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/01/a-divide-between-college-non-college-republicans/](http://pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/01/a-divide-between-college-non-college-republicans/).

<sup>45</sup> James McBride, "What Brexit Reveals About Rising Populism," Council on Foreign Relations, last modified June 29, 2016, <https://www.cfr.org/interview/what-brexit-reveals-about-rising-populism>.

<sup>46</sup> Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Carsten Reinemann, Jesper Stromback, and Claes De Vreese, eds. *Populist political communication in Europe*. Routledge, 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Reinhard Heinisch, Christina Holtz-Bacha, and Oscar Mazzoleni, eds. *Political populism*. Nomos eLibrary, 2017.

<sup>48</sup> Ruth Wodak and Michał Krzyżanowski. "Right-wing populism in Europe & USA: Contesting politics & discourse beyond 'Orbanism' and 'Trumpism'." *Journal of Language and Politics* 16, no. 4 (2017): 471-484.

<sup>49</sup> Zielonka, *Is the EU Doomed?* Cambridge: Polity, 2014.

<sup>50</sup> Charles A. Kupchan, "As Nationalism Rises, Will the European Union Fail?" *Washington Post*, August 29, 2010.

<sup>51</sup> Martin Schain, Aristide Zolberg, and Patrick Hossay, eds. *Shadows over Europe: The development and impact of the extreme right in Western Europe*. Springer, 2002.

the continent, the existing evidence still remains limited to make sweeping claim that the foundation of democracy is eroding in Western Europe countries due to digital technologies.<sup>52</sup> However, it is pertinent to mention here that rapid advancement of digital technologies cannot rule out the possibility of the transformation it will have on the democratic landscape of Western European countries in terms of voter behaviour, fake news, weaponization of social media, etc.<sup>53</sup>

The political parties which rose to prominence in late 18<sup>th</sup> century as a model to representative democracy are in declining phase.<sup>54</sup> However, there is a shift in this declining trend. Some political parties appear to regaining ground.<sup>55</sup> This is due to their innovative style of using digital technology to connect with citizens.<sup>56</sup> Traditional parties can learn from these tech-savvy political parties.<sup>57</sup>

#### Differing Nature of Democracy

Democracy is practiced differently in various Western European countries.<sup>58</sup> Some countries have adopted 'majoritarian democracies' like United Kingdom whereas others follow 'consensual democracies' which is prevalent in Belgium and Switzerland.<sup>59</sup> In other words, no country seems to be immune from the crisis which European Union is

currently facing.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, the political frameworks adopted by several European countries in communicating to EU's own structures appear to be problematic for representative democracy.<sup>61</sup>

In recent times, a number of experiments have been undertaken in direct and deliberative democracy.<sup>62</sup> More so experiments should be undertaken in future so that we can understand how these direct or deliberative democratic structures should be integrated into the existing institutions.

It is pertinent to mention how the concept of democracy has evolved over time. Therefore, there can't be a perfect model and the process will continue to evolve further.<sup>63</sup> Whatever the final solution will be, it will not be weakening of democracy in response to pressure from 'populism' but will ultimately lead towards 'democratization of democracy'.<sup>64</sup>

#### Rising Tide of Nationalism

The desire of disintegrating EU by populist leaders should not be ignored. The tide of nationalism in European countries is gradually rising and the notion of taking back control is gaining wide traction. Populists have been able to garner support across Europe by exploiting nationalist sentiments.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, external factors – Islamist terrorism

<sup>52</sup> Maria Daniela Poli, "Contemporary populism and the economic crisis in western Europe." *Baltic Journal of Political Science* 5, no. 1 (2016): 40-52.

<sup>53</sup> Bojan Bugarcic and Alenka Kuhelj. "Varieties of Populism in Europe: Is the Rule of law in Danger?." *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law* 10, no. 1 (2018): 21-33.

<sup>54</sup> Martin Schain, Aristide Zolberg, and Patrick Hossay, eds. *Shadows over Europe: The development and impact of the extreme right in Western Europe*. Springer, 2002.

<sup>55</sup> Roger Karapin, "Radical-right and neo-fascist political parties in Western Europe." *COMPARATIVE POLITICS-NEW YORK-* 30 (1998): 213-234.

<sup>56</sup> Maria Daniela Poli. "Contemporary populism and the economic crisis in western Europe." *Baltic Journal of Political Science* 5, no. 1 (2016): 40-52.

<sup>57</sup> Martin Schain, Aristide Zolberg, and Patrick Hossay, eds. *Shadows over Europe: The development and impact of the extreme right in Western Europe*. Springer, 2002.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> John Brown. "Neoliberalization, De-democratization, and Populist Responses in Western Europe, the US, and Latin America." *Critical Sociology* (2020): 0896920520927456.

<sup>60</sup> Belén Fernández-García and O. Óscar Luengo. "Populist parties in Western Europe. An analysis of the three core elements of populism." (2018).

<sup>61</sup> Ben Stanley, "Populism in central and eastern Europe." *The Oxford handbook of populism* 1 (2017): 140-158;

<sup>62</sup> Ulrike M. Vieten, and Scott Poynting. "Contemporary far-right racist populism in Europe." (2016): 533-540.

<sup>63</sup> Jan-Werner Müller. "Populism and constitutionalism." In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. 2017.

<sup>64</sup> Christa Deiwiiks. "Populism." *Living Reviews in Democracy* 1 (2009); Maria Laura Rodriguez, "The Intertwining of Two Domestic Political Crises and the End of Spain's Perceived Immunity to the Far-Right." Available at SSRN 3622664 (2020).

<sup>65</sup> Don Kalb and Gábor Halmai, eds. *Headlines of nation, subtexts of class: Working class populism*

and migrant crisis – have also played a pivotal role in helping populists gaining support.

### **Policymaking**

The major future risk from populist leaders from EU will be that of stalling EU policy making. The stalling of policy making can be done by blocking any prospects of compromise, which remains at the heart of EU policymaking. This approach will lead to further strengthening of nationalist governments and further undermining of European citizens. The traditional rhetoric of populists is that EU is an inefficient bureaucracy which is unable to protect them. The stalling of EU policymaking will help them amplifying their message that the EU is an inefficient bureaucratic structure which is unable to protect national governments. Consequently, there is a strong possibility that the EU parliament will be paralyzed. Failure to found an alternative EU, European populists will not be successfully in developing a project similar to that of EU.

Europe's far right politicians have wanted to dismantle the European Union for years. But now, their tone has changed. Parties that once campaigned to abolish the European Union and its common currency, the euro, are now trying to attack it from within and their strategy seems to be paying off. In many European countries, the popularity of anti-European leaders is on the rise and in this year's European elections, far right and anti-EU parties are set to take up to 30% of the seats according to an opinion poll.

Just a few years ago, support for the European Union was at its lowest. First of all, there was economic malaise and a lot of people were upset and angered at the economic policies in the Eurozone, especially where the financial prices had hit particularly hard and the governments were forced to impose austerity measures and then secondly in 2015, almost a million people came over this panel, a few months, mostly refugees from Middle East, but also economic migrants from North Africa and this gave people the feeling the impression that the governments are not in control of the borders and neither is the European Union.

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and the return of the repressed in neoliberal Europe. Vol. 15. Berghahn Books, 2011.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Taggart, "New populist parties in Western Europe." *West European Politics* 18, no. 1 (1995): 34-51.

Anti-EU-politicians like France's Marine Le Pen and Italy's Matteo Salvini capitalized on some people's sentiment that the EU was the cause of all problems and then, in 2016, the British people have voted to leave the European Union. The spectacle of the UK's Brexit process, which is still ongoing, made many voters realize how complicated exiting the EU can be and Britain didn't even have the Euro. A lot of people who previously were toying with the idea of leaving the EU, suddenly started having second thoughts because they saw how difficult and painful and chaotic the Brexit process became and also how hard it is to untangle a country from the European Union, and therefore, also the populist leaders changed tactics so, instead of campaigning on referendums and leaving the EU, they started saying "We stay, but we want to change the EU from within."

When populist parties gain more power within an institution they had pledged to eliminate, it becomes very hard for them to agree what exactly the policies are, so what will happen most likely is that decisions will be much harder to take at the EU level and they will just stall as much as possible any new areas of European integration.

EU countries serving their individual interests over the Union has already led to misunderstandings and friction within the Bloc. Like when Italy decided not to allow migrant boats to disembark in its ports. As the rhetoric resonates with voters, traditional parties that are losing ground are also starting to become more critical of the EU. So while the European Union and the Euro's existence may not be threatened right now, it's government is said to be more divided than ever.

### **Climate Change**

The 2010s saw majority of the populists' rhetoric revolve around immigration and sovereignty. In this decade, climate change can become a dominating topic. The political fragmentation across Europe has not only resulted in the emergence of far-right populist parties. These parties will have to contend with populist parties in Europe which view climate change as elitist hoax.<sup>66</sup> In other words, populist arguments about climate change are much similar to that of immigration.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Yasmine Serhan, "Populism Is Morphing in Insidious Ways," *The Atlantic*, last modified January 6, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/01/future-populism-2020s/604393/>.

### Tendency of Voters

According to recent studies, young voters are more conservative now as compared to previous generations.<sup>68</sup> The European political landscape is to undergo lasting impact.<sup>69</sup> Young voters are going to constitute large chunk of voter demographics.<sup>70</sup> According to British Journal of Political Science study, young voters are now more conservative than previous generation.

### Uncertainty of certain EU members

The uncertainty among EU members like Hungary, Austria and Poland will provide an opportunity to Eurosceptic populists to secure another major victory in near future.<sup>71</sup> If any of the three countries leave the EU than it will raise fundamental questions about the legitimacy and longevity of the EU. The financial crisis have left a black mark on the EU and economic integration. The migrant crisis continue to pose as a central issue that has the potential to threat survival of the EU.<sup>72</sup>

### Economic Interdependence

The economic integration among and between EU member states is enormous, which makes their fates intertwined to an unprecedented degree. The volume of trade and investment flowing between EU country

is immense.<sup>73</sup> In 2018, 64 per cent of the total value of goods was exported from one EU country to another. Intra-EU trade was valued at more than €3.5 trillion, 80 percent higher than exports to non-EU member states.<sup>74</sup>

More than 60 percent of total inward FDI flows into EU from other member states. Production and supply chains that span across the bloc are an even deeper form of economic integration.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, rising number of cross-border mergers and acquisitions are another manifestation of high end economic integration within EU.<sup>76</sup>

Economic integration promotes higher rates of economic growth, gains in productivity, and rising living standards across the EU which result in increasing popularity among domestic producers, interest groups and publics. Consequently, this economic interdependence dampens tendencies toward conflict and disintegration in the EU.<sup>77</sup> In other words, EU member states found solutions because they don't have any other choice but to cooperate in world's most economically integrated continent.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Jonathan Kennedy, "Populist politics and vaccine hesitancy in Western Europe: an analysis of national-level data." *European journal of public health* 29, no. 3 (2019): 512-516.

<sup>69</sup> Armèn Hakhverdian and Christel Koop. "Consensus democracy and support for populist parties in Western Europe." *Acta Politica* 42, no. 4 (2007): 401-420;

<sup>70</sup> Ruth Wodak, Majid KhosraviNik, and Brigitte Mral, eds. *Right-wing populism in Europe: Politics and discourse*. A&C Black, 2013; Italo Colantone and Piero Stanig. "Heterogeneous drivers of heterogeneous populism." *VoxEU*. org 10 (2019).

<sup>71</sup> Laurent Bernhard and Hanspeter Kriesi. "Populism in election times: a comparative analysis of 11 countries in Western Europe." *West European Politics* 42, no. 6 (2019): 1188-1208.

<sup>72</sup> Michael F. Kickham III, "Trumpocracy: The Rise of Populism in Europe and America" (2017). Theses. 308. <https://irl.umsl.edu/thesis/308>;

<sup>73</sup> Daniele Caramani and Luca Manucci. "National past and populism: the re-elaboration of fascism and its impact on right-wing populism in Western

Europe." *West European Politics* 42, no. 6 (2019): 1159-1187.

<sup>74</sup> Eurostat, "International Trade in Goods," Last updated March 2019. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/International\\_trade\\_in\\_goods#Main\\_statistical\\_findings](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/International_trade_in_goods#Main_statistical_findings).

<sup>75</sup> Hans-Georg Betz, *Exclusionary populism in Western Europe in the 1990s and beyond: A threat to democracy and civil rights?*. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2004.

<sup>76</sup> Thomson Reuters, *Mergers and Acquisitions Review*. Accessed January 13, 2020. <http://prod-uppimage-read.ft.com/3b08df8e-cf53-11e8-a9f2-7574db66bcd5>.

<sup>77</sup> Tjitske Akkerman, Sarah L. de Lange, and Matthijs Rooduijn, eds. *Radical right-wing populist parties in Western Europe: Into the mainstream?*. Routledge, 2016.

<sup>78</sup> Andrew Moravcsik, "Defending Europe: Don't Bet on EU's Demise." *Newsweek*, last modified May 29, 2010.



### International Institutions

During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, European diplomats were observed to be discovering European identify and interests.<sup>79</sup> A number of official statements and documents have made it explicitly clear that the multilateral institution is a strong proponent of the multilateralism with United Nations at the heart of such multilateralism.<sup>80</sup> These policy document reflect the fact that the EU has done away with the self-image of being ‘frontrunner’ or ‘leading player’. Moreover, the organization is no more in a reactive mode when it comes to certain policy fields and international organizations.<sup>81</sup>

Apart from economic interdependence, liberalist scholars have always pointed out the role of regional and international institutions in binding EU together. Institutions has always remain at the heart of EU. It is pertinent to mention here that European integration began with the formation of multilateral institution.<sup>82</sup> In early 1950, European Coal and Steel Community was established. It acted as supranational authority which united the coal and steel industries of six Western European countries.<sup>83</sup>

Currently, EU is the most densely institutionalized region of the world. Several European countries have given up their sovereignty to supranational organizations in at least five policy areas to varying length. These five policy areas are as follows:

- Monetary policy
- Trade negotiations
- Environmental protection
- Consumer protection
- Defense and Security

<sup>79</sup> Knud Erik Jørgensen, ed. *The European Union and international organizations*. Routledge, 2009.

<sup>80</sup> European Council (2003) *A Secure Europe in a Better World*, Brussels: The Council Secretariat

<sup>81</sup> European Commission (2004) *A World Player. The European Union’s External Relations*, Brussels: DG Press and Communication.

<sup>82</sup> Richard Maher, "International Relations Theory and the Future of European Integration." *International Studies Review* (2020).

<sup>83</sup> John Gillingham, 1991. *Coal, Steel, and the Rebirth of Europe, 1945–1955: The Germans and French From Ruhr Conflict to Economic Community*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Additionally, EU countries have pooled in their resources for a number of organisations like European Commission, European Court of Justice and European Central Bank. Through institutions, cooperation is facilitated and is mostly achieved which would not be the case in other situations.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, institutions can play a number of other roles which are as follows:

- Make credible commitments and mutual understanding
- Facilitate contract and communication
- Reduce uncertainty
- Facilitate monitoring and enforcement
- Regularize and routinize joint decision-making processes

Moreover, highly institutionalized orders are more durable than those made by association of states.<sup>85</sup> The massive sunk and exit costs also make it near impossible for member states to ensure the failure of EU project.<sup>86</sup>

The EU’s support for multilateralism is considered among the key strategic objectives of the EU. The EU policy statements highlight the importance of an effective United Nations for effective multilateralism.<sup>87</sup> These explicit reference highlight the importance of mutual cooperation between EU and international organizations for their future viability.

### Democracy

Democratic values and political systems is another factor which is viewed as one on the basis of which EU member states can be kept united.<sup>88</sup> Currently,

<sup>84</sup> Robert Axelrod and Robert O. Keohane. 1985. "Achieving Cooperation under Anarchy: Strategies and Institutions." *World Politics* 38 (1): 226–54.

<sup>85</sup> Alec Stone Sweet and Wayne Sandholtz. 1997. "European Integration and Supranational Governance." *Journal of European Public Policy* 4 (3): 297–317.

<sup>86</sup> Paul Pierson, 1996. "The Path to European Integration: A Historical Institutionalist Analysis." *Comparative Political Studies* 29 (2): 123–63.

<sup>87</sup> R. Cooper, (2003) *The Breaking of Nations. Order and Chaos in the Twentieth Century*, London: Atlantic Books.

<sup>88</sup> Wallace J. Thies 2012. "Is the EU Collapsing?" *International Studies Review* 14, no. 2 (2012): 225–39.

the entire continental Europe is democratic with the exception of Belarus, Moldova, and Russia, which are located in EU's periphery.<sup>89</sup> Democracy has tempered the harsh and destabilizing forces of political extremism over its long and bloody history.<sup>90</sup> Within EU states, disputes are settled via bargaining and compromise rather than through force and violence.<sup>91</sup>

There are both structural and normative (or cultural) explanations for how and why a common commitment to democratic institutions and values will help preserve the EU.<sup>92</sup> The structural explanation emphasizes the constitutional checks and balances that tie the hands of political leaders.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, institutional rules also make it very difficult for anti-EU extremist parties to come to power.<sup>94</sup> Euroskeptic political parties such as Alternative for Germany, France's National Rally or Netherlands's Party for Freedom may secure seats in

the national parliament but they have little chance of actually leading a government.<sup>95</sup>

Despite ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences, democratic polities share certain fundamental beliefs and practices.<sup>96</sup> The democratic norms create expectations that disputes with other democracies will be settled by negotiation and mutual accommodation rather than by coercion or the use of force.<sup>97</sup>

There is also no great popular demand to see the breaking apart of the EU. Confidence in EU institutions have witnessed sharp increase in many member states.<sup>98</sup> Despite recent troubles, public opinion across the EU is broadly supportive of membership in the EU.<sup>99</sup> In 2019, trust in the EU reached its highest level since 2009, and more than six in ten Europeans expressed their optimism about the future of the EU.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Timo Lochocki, "The rise of populism in Western Europe." Cham, Switzerland: Springer (2018); Michael A. Peters, "The end of neoliberal globalisation and the rise of authoritarian populism." (2018): 323-325.

<sup>90</sup> Matthijs Rooduijn and Tjitske Akkerman. "Flank attacks: Populism and left-right radicalism in Western Europe." *Party Politics* 23, no. 3 (2017): 193-204.

<sup>91</sup> Luca Manucci and Edward Weber. "Why The Big Picture Matters: Political and Media Populism in Western Europe since the 1970s." *Swiss Political Science Review* 23, no. 4 (2017): 313-334.

<sup>92</sup> Hans-Georg Betz and C. Liang. "Against the "green totalitarianism": Anti-Islamic nativism in contemporary radical right-wing populism in Western Europe." *Europe for the Europeans: The foreign and security policy of the populist radical right* (2007): 33-54.

<sup>93</sup> Hans-Georg Betz. "Xenophobia, identity politics and exclusionary populism in Western Europe." *Socialist Register* 39 (2003).

<sup>94</sup> Paul Taggart. "Populism in Western Europe." In *The Oxford handbook of populism*. 2017; Gábor Halmai. "Populism, authoritarianism and constitutionalism." *German Law Journal* 20, no. 3 (2019): 296-313.

<sup>95</sup> Terri E. Givens. *Voting Radical Right in Western Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

<sup>96</sup> Teun Pauwels, *Populism in Western Europe: Comparing Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands*. Routledge, 2014; Christian Kroll and Vera Zipperer. "Sustainable Development and Populism." *Ecological Economics* 176 (2020): 106723.

<sup>97</sup> Duane Swank and Hans-Georg Betz. "Globalization, the welfare state and right-wing populism in Western Europe." *Socio-Economic Review* 1, no. 2 (2003): 215-245

<sup>98</sup> Bruce Stokes, Richard Wike and Dorothy Manevich, "Post-Brexit, Europeans More Favorable toward EU." Pew Research Center, June 2; Ingolfur Blühdorn, and Felix Butzlaff. "Rethinking Populism: Peak democracy, liquid identity and the performance of sovereignty." *European Journal of Social Theory* 22, no. 2 (2019): 191-211.

<sup>99</sup> Hans-Georg Betz. *Radical right-wing populism in Western Europe*. Springer, 1994; Josh Booth and Patrick Baert. *The Dark Side of Podemos?: Carl Schmitt and Contemporary Progressive Populism*. Routledge, 2018.

<sup>100</sup> European Commission, (2019) *Standard Eurobarometer 91: Public Opinion in the European Union*. Accessed January 13, 2020. <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2253>.

### **Economic Populism**

Populists in power have one thing in common. They regard limits on their power as undermining the will of the people. For many, this aversion to institutional constraints extends to the economy, which explains why populists are so often at odds with regulatory agencies, central banks, and global trade rules. But while populism in the political domain is almost always harmful, economic populism can sometimes be justified.

Economists tend to have a soft spot for limiting politicians' discretion, because policymaking that is too responsive to short-term domestic politics can hurt long-term outcomes. Politicians with the power to print money, for example, may generate "surprise inflation" to boost output and employment in the short run – say, before an election. The solution is an independent central bank, operating free from politics to maintain price stability. But controls on economic policy are not always beneficial. Restraints may be instituted by special interests or elites themselves. In such cases, delegation to autonomous agencies or signing on to global rules does not serve society, but only a narrow caste of insiders.

Today's populist backlash is rooted partly in the belief that economic policymaking has been hijacked by such interests. Multinational corporations and investors have shaped the international trade agenda, resulting in global regimes that benefit capital at the expense of labor. Banks and other financial institutions have been especially successful at instituting rules that give them free rein and what benefited society in one era may not benefit it in another.

Independent central banks played a critical role in bringing inflation down in the 1980s and 1990s. But in the current low-inflation environment, their focus on price stability imparts a deflationary bias to economic policy, and is in tension with employment generation and growth. Such "liberal technocracy" may be at its apogee in the European Union, where economic rules and regulations are enacted without deliberation at the national level. This gap has given rise to populist, Euroskeptical political parties.

In such instances, returning economic autonomy to elected governments may be the right move. Exceptional times require the freedom to experiment in economic policy. Political populism that stifles pluralism and undermines liberal democratic norms is a menace to be avoided. But economic populism is occasionally necessary. In some cases, it may even

help forestall the arrival of its more dangerous cousin.

### **COVID-19**

This crisis comes at a very interesting time across the world. We see the rise of populist nationalist governments. We see the undermining of professional capabilities. The elite are biased and think only of themselves at least, that was the narrative going into this crisis. Now, unlike the financial crisis, which many people blamed the bankers for, as well as the administrative elite that let them take the risk that they actually took, this crisis is more what economists would call exogenous. It's coming from the outside. It's virtually an act of God as they sometimes term this and to that extent, it is harder to find somebody to blame.

Of course, politicians are doing their best to do that. But it's also possible to recognize expertise here. We have seen countries which have a more reasonable administration taking early action. We have seen more populist administrations thinking somehow that magical thinking would be enough to stave off this crisis. We have seen administrations finally come to recognize the value of professional expertise and bring more competent people on board in managing the crisis. So, one hope is politically this reestablishes the value of competence, of professionalism and gives those with those credentials greater credibility.

Something which is very necessary if we are to navigate the challenges of the future. So, how the medical establishment, how the administrative establishment performs in this crisis will be very important to see whether they regain the credibility that professionals had before the global financial crisis. That change may also imply that people now will also demand more expertise from their leaders, and be less willing to elect leaders that talk a good game, but are a little less capable, administratively. But that remains to be seen. The research thinks it all depends on how this plays out, and whether our populist leaders can claim credit eventually for whatever happens regardless of their direct contribution to the outcomes.

On the question of how this global pandemic will change our politics, it really does not matter what is the political ideology while combating COVID-19. Democratic countries like New Zealand, South Korea, Denmark, Austria and Germany have been able to better cope with the deadly virus. On the other

hand, China and Vietnam have also managed to contain the virus. Classic populist Viktor Orban have also done a great job in Hungary.

While understanding whether government is interested in governing, we can conclude that individuals like Trump and Bolsonaro are not unclear about governing. They are more interested in politics as performance. While remaining indifferent towards governance, these individuals are trying to dismantle the state. Contrarily, there are other autocratic and populist politicians who know that they can remain in power as long they are effectively dealing with the virus.

In future, the populist leaders who does not care about governing will be disposed off. However, it is not necessary that a more effective democratic government is replaced. Rather a more effective dictator or autocrat will be able to actually deliver governance that people care about as demonstrated in Hungary and Poland. Moreover, there is possibility that people might become more interested in government's performance rather than who is governing. In brief, successful governments will be those believe in delivering governance to people.

### **Conclusion**

In terms of impact, populism in Western Europe has transformed in certain ways as it has done to overall Europe. Firstly, mushrooming of populism across the continent has led to increasing cooperation between right-wing parties across different countries. Secondly, there has been increasing tendency of Eurosceptic rhetoric across Western Europe. Thirdly, populism has resulted in changing face of European politics. The ascendancy of power by various populist parties in various countries have contributed in changing the democratic outlook of the continent. Fourthly, the penetration of populists in the European power corridors have contributed to emergence of various important players in national politics of European countries, who often act as kingmakers parties. Fifthly, there is growing emergence of rhetoric on blaming EU for virtually everything. This has resulted in emergence of multi-polarity without multilateralism. Consequently, centre-right parties have adopted more extreme positions. Sixthly, the emergence of populist parties as kingmakers party is now straining the tradition of coalition governments in various European countries. Seventhly, the rise of populism has put Europe on the pathway to be become a right-wing Europe.

