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Special Double International Issue:

The Golden Dawn Model: Once Emulated by U.S. White Nationalists, Greece's Anti-Migrant Party Faces an Uncertain Future

Enemy in the Making: The Language of "Anti-Sorosism" in the U.S. and Hungary

Nothing Is Untouched: The Aftermath in Chemnitz

End Times Antisemitism: Christian Zionism, Christian Nationalism, and the Threat to Democracy

The Right in the Streets: The Past and Present of the Polish March of Independence

Third Millennium Fascism: Highlights from Italy

Right-Wing Populism Outside the Global North: Brazil and the Philippines

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Hello from PRA. We hope you're staying safe and well during these challenging times.

Our latest issue, nearly a year in the making, is a special internationally themed edition of *The Public Eye*, drawing on contributions from 10 writers and covering nine countries. Overall, the picture these pieces show is grim, with country after country contending with a greatly emboldened Far Right, and many sliding away from democracy and toward autocracy. Over the course of finalizing this issue, as much of the world shut down to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, some nations used the crisis as an opportunity to further entrench illiberal or authoritarian policies, as with Viktor Orbán's seizure of emergency powers in Hungary. But all of these trends have been years in the making, and many are deeply interrelated.

In our (appropriately) first piece of the issue, **"The Golden Dawn Model"** (pg. 4), Patrick Strickland considers the rise of Greece's Far Right. Nearly a decade ago, the world watched in shock as the fascist, neonazi party linked to rising anti-refugee violence began to also gain power in the Hellenic Parliament—a terrifying preview of things to come across Europe more broadly. Less well-understood was how Golden Dawn had forged close ties with U.S. neonazis and White supremacists, helping the Far Right grow and adapt on both continents.

Next up, in **"Enemy in the Making"** (pg. 7), Anna Szilágyi and Kristóf Szombati undertake an authoritative exploration of how liberal philanthropist George Soros became the preeminent bogeyman of the global Right, by studying how he is discussed in his native Hungary and his adopted home of the United States. In both countries, age-old antisemitic stereotypes, baseless conspiracism, and sophisticated propaganda techniques have been deployed by political leaders and amplified by right-wing media to legitimize illiberal rule and demonize pro-democracy initiatives.

In **"Nothing Is Untouched"** (pg. 14), Hilary Moore reports on the aftermath of the mob violence that shook Chemnitz, Germany, in 2018, when hordes of protesters attacked people of color perceived to be immigrants or refugees. That violence, which drew global condemnation, may have seemed spontaneous, but as Moore writes, it grew from a years-long process of neonazi and fascist mobilization, and before that, the untended traumas of Germany's reunification, which left Chemnitz in a "pre-pogrom" state.

In **“End Times Antisemitism”** (pg. 19), PRA assistant research director Steven Gardiner takes a deep dive into understanding how Christian Zionism has forged a powerful and toxic bond between the U.S. and Israel. Long a simmering force on the Christian Right, in the Trump era, apocalyptic Christian Zionist beliefs are now national policy—the motivation behind destabilizing moves like the relocation of the U.S. Embassy, the recognition of Israeli claims to contested territory, and the defunding of agencies that provide support to Palestinian refugees—to the detriment of Jews, Muslims, and democracy itself.

“The Right in the Streets” (pg. 25), Piotr Kocyba and Małgorzata Łukianow’s historical study of Poland’s annual March of Independence, takes us on a tour of how the Polish Far Right has appropriated and converted a national holiday into an ethno-nationalist spectacle, marked by White supremacist slogans and violence. But despite those facts, Kocyba and Łukianow write, the march continues to draw tens of thousands each year, as well as the support of the ruling political regime.

In **“Third Millennium Fascism”** (pg. 29), Maddalena Gretel Cammelli plumbs the backstory of Italy’s idiosyncratic but influential neofascist group CasaPound Italia. Through a mix of cultural offerings, symbolic rituals, powerful political alliances, and street violence, CPI offers less a specific policy agenda than an all-encompassing community for young recruits to neofascism. And, thanks to a sophisticated approach to media campaigning, they’ve gone almost completely unchallenged.

Finally, in **“Right-Wing Populism Outside the Global North”** (pg. 33), Ramon H. Royandoyan and Mario Braga explore how the same authoritarian trends sweeping Europe and the U.S. are also evolving in Brazil and the Philippines. While local political realities mean that certain staples from the authoritarian playbook—like anti-immigrant scapegoating—are less effective there, other popular concerns, from drugs to crime, are easily tapped to take their place. And understanding the rise of figures like Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro or the Philippines’ Rodrigo Duterte is paramount to understanding how developing nations fit into the global populism puzzle.

In between our print issues, PRA is publishing regularly online, including ongoing coverage on how the COVID-19 crisis and the Black Lives Matter movement protests are being affected or exploited by the Right, so be sure to visit us at politicalresearch.org.

Kathryn Joyce



The Golden Dawn Model

Once Emulated by U.S. White Nationalists, Greece's Anti-Migrant Party Faces an Uncertain Future



Golden Dawn members hold a party flag at a rally outside of the party headquarters in Athens in March 2015. Credit: DTRocks/ Wikimedia Commons.

October 24, 1998. Anyone walking past the conference in Thessaloniki, Greece's second-largest city, would have likely found the presence of guard dogs at the entrance odd, the Southern Poverty Law Center's *Intelligence Report* later pointed out. After all, the event sign read: "Greek Coordination of Touring Groups."¹

Four days after the conference ended, Greek newspapers learned why a tour-

ism conference required such stringent security²: it hadn't been a tourism conference at all. Rather, around 150 people had gathered for two days of speeches about strengthening ties between White nationalist and neonazi groups across national borders. Hailing from Austria to South Africa, Germany to Portugal, and the U.S. to Belgium, the participants mingled, donned swastikas, and performed fascist salutes.

Golden Dawn, a then-obscure band of

Greek neonazis, had organized the conference, dubbed the Fifth Pan-European Conference of Nationalist and Social Forces.³ The keynote speaker was William Luther Pierce III, founder of the U.S.-based National Alliance and pseudonymous author of *The Turner Diaries*, a futuristic novel that envisions race war consuming North America.

By the time Pierce touched down in Greece, his 1978 novel was well known for inspiring hate crimes and terror at-

tacks.⁴ Among them, the 1984 murder of Jewish radio host Alan Berg by members of The Order, a White nationalist terror group; Timothy McVeigh's 1995 bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building, which killed 168 people; and the 1998 lynching of James Byrd in Jasper, Texas.

That history of violence was no issue for Golden Dawn, which, since its founding in the 1980s, has celebrated U.S. neonazi groups, translated their texts, and emulated their tactics.⁵ In 1993, the group registered as a political party. And in 2001, party chief Nikos Michaloliakos, writing under a pseudonym, published his own novel, *Strike Team Lance*,

Golden Dawn released a statement praising the Charlottesville rally as a “dynamic demonstration against illegal immigration,” during which “fully equipped anarcholeftists attacked the peaceful demonstration of the American Patriots.”

setting themes from *The Turner Diaries* in Greece.⁶

Golden Dawn was still far from attracting the international headlines that chronicled its violent ascent to parliamentary prominence more than a decade later, but the group was already currying favor with U.S. fascists. Although Pierce bemoaned that hundreds of years of Ottoman rule had “taken a racial toll” on Greeks—he later wrote that he saw “tall, light-eyed blondes” as well as people too “dark” for his tastes—he celebrated Golden Dawn as “an organization with a clear, genetically based racial policy.”⁷

In 2012, amid attacks rippling out around Greece, Golden Dawn surged in a pair of legislative elections that catapulted the once little-known neonazi group into Greece's parliament for the first time in its history. That year, far-right violence fanned out around the nation, and the Athens-based Racist Violence Recording Network documented 154 incidences of racial violence, all but three of which targeted refugees and migrants.⁸ Although not new, the violence was surging, and it showed no sign of letting up.

Golden Dawn's rise to parliamentary prominence—a surge from commanding street gangs to occupying 18 seats in the Hellenic Parliament—provided a model for likeminded White nationalists the world over. In effect, its electoral success suggested that fascists didn't have to choose between boots and suits; they could simultaneously infiltrate mainstream democratic institutions while unleashing mobs in the streets.⁹ With that, Golden Dawn shifted from importer to exporter, and it soon inaugurated international chapters from Australia to the U.S.¹⁰

In the summer of 2013, neonazi writer Andrew Anglin traveled to Athens and launched *Daily Stormer*, the fascist blog that borrows its name from the Nazi-era German newspaper *Der Stürmer*.¹¹ In Greece, Anglin hobnobbed with Golden Dawn

members and attended their demonstrations, and in between posts mocking African Americans and pushing antisemitic conspiracy theories, he often defended the group and celebrated its success.

“There's no way that a person who hasn't witnessed it could really understand the feeling you get when you see all these...young men in black shirts, in very good shape, all standing in a line, carrying flags, marching, and singing,” Anglin said in an interview with Texas-based Holocaust denier Carolyn Yeager.¹²

But by September 2013, Golden Dawn's successes started to run thin when party member Giorgos Roupakias stabbed to death 34-year-old Pavlos Fyssas, an anti-fascist rapper known by the stage name Killah P.¹³ For years, party members and supporters had enjoyed relative impunity when they attacked immigrants, including the murder, nine months earlier, of a Pakistani migrant worker named Shahzad Luqman.¹⁴ But killing a Greek proved something that even sympathetic police forces¹⁵ and right-wing politicians couldn't ignore. Golden Dawn's leadership and dozens of high-profile members were arrested and charged with operat-

ing a criminal organization.¹⁶

Fyssas's murder sent shockwaves throughout Greece, prompted massive anti-fascist rallies, and left 69 party members on trial, but it initially did little to wither Golden Dawn's support. Legislative elections in January 2015 saw Golden Dawn assume the rank of the parliament's third largest party.

U.S. neonazis leaped to Golden Dawn's defense. *Daily Stormer* likened the crackdown to the world's condemnation of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad for using chemical weapons, claiming: “[T]here is zero evidence that the hierarchy of the Golden Dawn had anything to do with the stabbing of Killah P.”¹⁷ The White nationalist blog *Occidental Observer* described the arrests as “an assault on all European peoples.”¹⁸

But it was Matthew Heimbach, founder of the Traditionalist Worker Party (TWP), who emerged as one of Golden Dawn's loudest U.S. supporters.¹⁹ In recent years, he traveled to Athens several times to meet and interview party members.

Back in the U.S. Heimbach preached the necessity of coupling street-level violence with social programs—drug addiction treatment and canned food donation drives—similar to those Golden Dawn organized to garner support during Greece's crushing financial crisis.²⁰

In August 2017, Heimbach was involved in Unite the Right, when hundreds of White nationalists rallied against the decision to remove a Confederate monument in Charlottesville, Virginia. For two days, the protesters marched and attacked community members, counter-demonstrators, and anti-fascist activists throughout the city. On the second day, James Alex Fields Jr., who'd been photographed marching with a neonazi group earlier that morning, plowed his car into a crowd, injured over a dozen, and killed 32-year-old anti-racist marcher Heather Heyer.

In an interview about the movement's organizing tactics during that rally, Heimbach told *Vice* reporter Elle Reeve,²¹ “[We’re] primarily following the European example of Golden Dawn, the Nordic Resistance Movement, and other organizations that really are at the vanguard of

nationalist organizing in the world.”²²

In the days that followed, Golden Dawn came under fire in Greece.²³ Photos emerged online of Heimbach and Michaloliakos posing and shaking hands.²⁴

Always quick to double down, Golden Dawn released a statement²⁶ praising the Charlottesville rally as a “dynamic demonstration against illegal immigration,” during which “fully equipped anarcho-

of violence.”³⁰

Then a puzzling development occurred. After more than four years of court hearings, hundreds of witnesses delivering testimony of brutal attacks,

Golden Dawn wasn’t the only culprit, but there was little doubt that the party tilled the soil for much of the bloodshed, while finding a comfortable place as an icon for far-right groups the world over.

And left-wing opponents pointed to a glowing profile of Heimbach published in Golden Dawn’s newspaper less than a week before Unite the Right, wherein Heimbach said, “Now the climate is being reversed. In Michaloliakos’s Greece, in Putin’s Russia and in Trump’s America, people choose leaders who will give them hope.”²⁵

leftists attacked the peaceful demonstration of the American Patriots.”²⁷

Heimbach’s attempts to build an entity at least partially modeled on Golden Dawn collapsed in 2018, when he was arrested for domestic violence after a fight stemming from a romantic affair with his father-in-law’s wife.²⁸

In the first six years of Golden Dawn’s presence in Greece’s parliament, from 2012 to 2018, the Racist Violence Recording Network documented 988 incidents of racist violence.²⁹ Golden Dawn wasn’t the only culprit, but there was little doubt that the party tilled the soil for much of the bloodshed, while finding a comfortable place as an icon for far-right groups the world over.

It wasn’t until snap elections in July 2019 that Greek voters ousted Golden Dawn from parliament, with many of their votes siphoned off by Greek Solution, a new, pro-Moscow Far-Right party. Golden Dawn started shuttering offices around the country, its website briefly went dark in late summer, and everyone expected the ongoing criminal organization trial to deliver a final blow to the party and its wave

and thousands of documents implicating Golden Dawn in organized violence, in December the prosecutor recommended that the court drop charges against the party’s high-ranking members, saying only Roupakias was responsible for killing Pavlos Fyssas.³¹

As of this writing, the court’s response is unclear.³² It isn’t obligated to accept the prosecutor’s recommendation, but it was a worrying sign. Whether the party will run in elections again or see much of its leadership incarcerated is yet to be seen. If they are acquitted, it will set a dangerous precedent in Greece and broadcast the message that Golden Dawn enjoys institutional impunity.

In early September 2017, I interviewed Magda Fyssa, the mother of Pavlos Fyssas, at her home in Piraeus, the chief sea port of Athens. Four years had passed since her son’s murder, and I mentioned that some U.S. White nationalists had hailed Golden Dawn as a model to be emulated. “Why would anyone want to be like them?” she asked in response. “They are Nazis that murder people. They are dangerous. There is nothing else to say of the matter.”³³

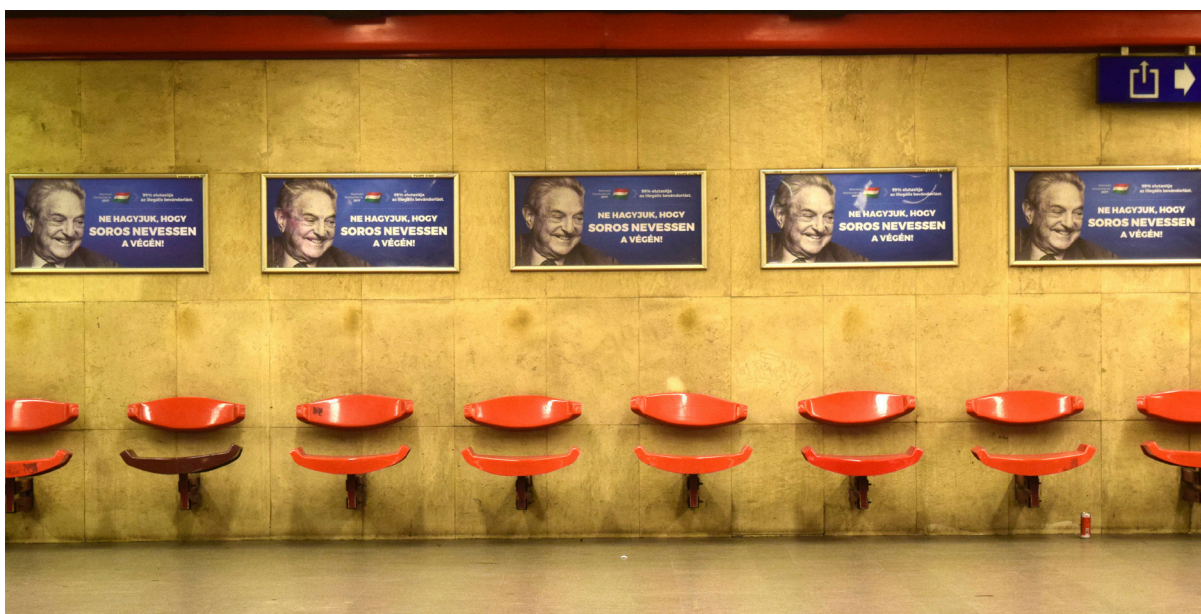
*Patrick Strickland is a journalist and author based in Athens, Greece. His first book, **Alerta! Alerta! Snapshots of Europe’s Anti-Fascist Struggle**, was published in November 2018.*



Poster memorializing Pavlos “Killah P” Fyssas, anti-fascist rapper killed by Golden Dawn party member. Credit: Nagarjun Kandukuru/Wikimedia Commons.

Enemy in the Making

The Language of “Anti-Sorosism” in the U.S. and Hungary



Hungarian government ad campaign in a Budapest metro station, featuring a photo of George Soros with the caption “Let’s not allow Soros to have the last laugh,” taken July 12, 2017. Credit: Pablo Gorondi/AP Photo.

“I really feel that Soros, in many ways, is the biggest danger to the entire Western world.” So argued British right-wing populist Nigel Farage in 2018 on the U.S. right-wing TV network Fox News.¹ Though talking in the singular, Farage was certainly not alone in expressing such resentment against the 89-year-old Hungarian-American Jew, George Soros, known as both a billionaire financier and investor and as the “open society” philanthropist and democracy proponent. Soros’s business interests and political activities are indeed inseparable: he used the money he made as an investor in the golden days of financialized capitalism to found a world-renowned university and to build a global organization, the Open Society Foundations (OSF), which plays

a preeminent role in promoting liberal democratic values the world over. While supporters laud him for the role OSF and its allies played in stabilizing liberal democracy in Eastern Europe after the fall of state socialism, critics accuse him of aggressively exporting democracy, promoting liberalism, and undermining the sovereignty of nation-states by using his economic power to influence local politics and policies around the globe.

In many corners of the world, Soros has become a convenient scapegoat for all kinds of maladies, both real and imagined, allowing nationalist politicians to establish the fiction of a Soros-driven liberal-globalist conspiracy. Today, anti-Soros rhetoric is flourishing globally, including in the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. But over the past

decade, attacks on Soros have become particularly vicious in the two countries where he has sought to intervene in a sustained and strategic manner: his native Hungary (which he left in 1947) and the United States (where he moved in 1956).

The dramatic escalation of attacks has sparked inquiries into potential links between anti-Soros rhetoric in the two countries, focusing on U.S. political consultants with ties to both U.S. Republicans and Hungary’s ruling nationalist-populist Fidesz party. That speculation seemed confirmed when U.S. political consultant George Birnbaum claimed, in a Swiss article published in 2019, that he and his colleague Arthur Finkelstein, a Republican pollster and campaign strategist, had invented the Soros-bogeyman for Hungary’s strongman, Viktor Orbán,

for whom they began working in 2008.²

This article will take a somewhat different tack, by investigating the rhetorical strategies that have helped establish Soros as a public enemy in the U.S.

core part of his agenda, conspiracy theories accusing Soros of sponsoring and organizing migration to the U.S. also exploded. Today, such allegations are made not just by right-wing media outlets, but

through the usual diplomatic channels, it also sought to score domestic political points by portraying the opposition as being in cahoots with anti-patriotic European elites. To achieve this, it solicited

To be truly effective, Orbán's anti-colonial narrative required a flesh-and-blood figure to blame. Finkelstein...suggested Soros as a suitable scapegoat.

and Hungary. By exploring the frames through which Soros has been forged into a folk devil, we can better understand the historical legacies of colonialism and antisemitism that energize and give meaning to anti-Sorosism, as well as its resonance in national-populist discourse and with broader audiences. We focus on the iconic image of the “puppet master,” which evokes themes of domination and conspiracy, and allows illiberal politicians to harness popular support for nationalist projects.

THE “PUPPET MASTER” IN THE U.S.

In the U.S., anti-Soros rhetoric is spread widely by Rupert Murdoch's Fox News. Although the outlet had already targeted Soros through the 2000s, a watershed moment came in 2010, when then-Fox News host Glenn Beck ran a three-piece series, “The Puppet Master,” depicting Soros as a shadowy conspirator who secretly rules the world. Tapping age-old antisemitic imagery and stereotypes, Beck argued that Soros aimed to undermine the political and economic systems of the U.S. and other countries through his Open Society Foundations, one of the biggest private funders of pro-democracy and human-rights movements worldwide. The show's audiovisual elements reinforced the message powerfully, with crime thriller music and puppeteers pulling strings.

Although Beck's program received substantial criticism,³ it catalyzed the proliferation of anti-Soros discourses on Fox, with hosts and pundits regularly repeating the same allegations. However, it wasn't until Donald Trump's presidency that the narrative truly gained momentum. While Fox hosts and pundits had long argued that Soros wants “open borders,”⁴ as Trump made the fight against Central American immigration a

by prominent Republican politicians, including the president himself.⁵

In the lead-up to the U.S. 2018 midterm elections, Central American migrants heading toward the U.S. border—described by mainstream U.S. media and politicians with the loaded term “migrant caravan”—were said to be financed by Soros. Florida Republican Rep. Matt Gaetz tweeted a video showing money being distributed to a crowd in a Spanish-speaking country, suggesting it was evidence of Soros funding the “caravan.”⁶ When a reporter asked Trump that October whether he believed Soros was sponsoring the “caravan,” he replied, “I wouldn't be surprised. A lot of people say yes.”⁷ The same month, in a speech in Missoula, Trump, who also described the migrants as an “invasion,” declared, “a lot of money has been passing to people to come up and try and get to the border.”⁸ Trump also shared Gaetz's video, though without a reference to Soros.⁹

THE BOGEYMAN IN HUNGARY

By the time mainstream U.S. politicians began portraying Soros as the mastermind behind mass immigration, the same accusation had already been leveled at Soros by leading representatives of Hungary's Fidesz party. Soros had been in Fidesz's crosshairs since 2013 but the campaign against him went full blast after the European migration crisis in 2015, when Hungarian officials suggested that Soros had authored the European Commission's plan to resettle refugees from the Southern European frontier region to member states that had not received refugees.¹⁰ According to this plan, Hungary should have accepted 1,294 refugees who previously entered the European Union through Greece or Italy. While the Hungarian government vehemently contested the proposal

the help of the late Republican consultant Arthur Finkelstein, whose approach has come to be referred to as “rejectionist voting,” the “Finkelstein formula,” or “Finkel-think.” Over several decades, Finkelstein developed a simple but efficient campaign strategy, urging his clients to demonize their rivals rather than promote their own programmatic vision. Finkelstein strongly believed in the ancient propaganda technique of repetition and used it to imprint emotionally resonant, iconic, and polarizing images and messages in the public's memory. This campaign strategy was a perfect fit for Orbán's political strategy and persona.

After his first prime ministerial term ended with defeat in the 2002 parliamentary elections, Orbán's rhetoric increasingly relied on a fundamentally Manichean, us-versus-them vision of politics as a battle between patriotic and globalist forces. This worldview became especially pronounced after Fidesz's landslide victory in the 2010 parliamentary elections, when Orbán set about transforming Hungary from a liberal democracy into a semi-authoritarian regime. His government's moves to capture independent institutions and rewrite the constitution, electoral, and media laws drew heavy criticism from the EU.¹¹ Orbán responded by depicting the EU as a quasi-colonial bureaucracy seeking to undermine nations' sovereignty. This charge, which evoked both Hungary's historical subjugation by the Soviet Union and the material decline of its traditional industrial regions and rural heartlands after joining the EU in 2004,¹² resonated with Fidesz's base. However, to be truly effective, Orbán's anti-colonial narrative required a flesh-and-blood figure to blame. Finkelstein, Birnbaum recalled, suggested Soros as a suitable scapegoat, despite the fact that in the 1980s, as a young and

originally liberal politician, Orbán had himself received financial support from the philanthropist.

The campaign latched on to an op-ed Soros published on the opinion website *Project Syndicate*, urging reforms of the EU's asylum system.¹³ This article became the key reference of the government's vast, nationwide anti-Soros campaign—estimated to have cost Hungarian taxpayers more than 40 million euros in 2017 alone.¹⁴ According to the government's narrative, migration to Europe is being financed and organized by Soros, who collaborates with a group of faceless EU bureaucrats to undermine the Christian identity and sovereignty of European states by turning them into “immigrant countr[ies].”¹⁵ In recent years, Hungarian authorities have publicized this message relentlessly through billboards, TV ads, political speeches, pamphlets, surveys, feigned public consultations, and the heavily biased coverage of the pro-government press that dominates the national media market. At the campaign's peak, posters featuring Soros's grinning face and the message “Don't let Soros have the last laugh” flooded the country.¹⁶ And in 2018, Fidesz used its two-thirds parliamentary majority to pass its controversial “Stop Soros” law, criminalizing NGO workers who assist asylum-seekers.

THE DISCURSIVE ANATOMY OF ANTI-SOROS RHETORIC

Anti-Soros narratives in the U.S. and Hungary differ primarily in terms of scope. While in the U.S., anti-Soros rhetoric is just one component of variegated right-wing discourses, in Hungary, it is the dominant language of the government and its media. Yet the rhetoric in both countries largely overlaps. Compar-

nificant similarities—particularly with regards to framing.

According to linguist George Lakoff, frames are mental constructs that can be activated by words.¹⁷ The mechanism is simple: when we hear a term, it evokes frames in our mind. The word “freedom,” for instance, activates the frames of liberation, autonomy, and independence. This is largely an automatic process. In other words, it is very difficult—if not impossible—to resist frames.

In our analysis of anti-Soros discourse in the U.S. and Hungary,¹⁸ we found that both evoke identical frames, which are themselves interconnected. These include the frames of: (1) *clandestine conspiracy*; (2) *excessive power and world domination*; (3) *the puppet master*; (4) *far-left radicalism*; and (5) *victimization*.

Clandestine Conspiracy

Fox and *Origo* frequently utilize terms that attach the frame of clandestine conspiracy to Soros. On Fox, for instance, the expression “under the radar”¹⁹ activates frames suggesting that Soros's activity is obscure, underground, and illegal.

The frame is also evoked and strengthened through insinuation: “The really frightening thing,” one Fox host declared, is that “most Americans have never even heard of George Soros.”²⁰ Fox speakers also referred to “the Soros group” and “Soros and his operations,”²¹ to invoke the frame of organized, subversive activity.

Phrases that represent Soros as masterminding a gigantic scheme can also activate this frame. One pundit, for instance, described OSF's work as “an incredibly well oiled, brilliantly orchestrated machine.”²² In some instances, the word “conspiracy” is used explicitly, as when another Fox guest said, “This is a George

cy frame is evoked mainly through compound nouns—a rhetorical device often used in political propaganda.²⁴ In everyday usage, compound nouns usually arise naturally and out of necessity when speakers have to name something new (as with technological innovations like “typewriter,” “earphones,” or “headset”). In political propaganda, however, compound nouns are invented and deployed strategically in order to shape the public discourse and thinking. But listeners are unlikely to notice this maneuver, and typically will accept that the new word, being a noun, is simply naming and identifying an existing thing. As a result, compound words function as a powerful tool in propaganda, constructing reality in novel ways while grammatically hiding how they can distort or misrepresent that which they describe.²⁵

In this way, the term “Soros-plan” became the central plank of the Hungarian government's propaganda campaign. When, in 2015, Soros published his op-ed calling upon the EU “to accept at least a million asylum-seekers annually for the foreseeable future,” Hungary's government used it to charge that Soros himself aimed to bring millions of migrants into Europe. The term “Soros-plan” became the government's shorthand reference for this fabricated allegation, which suggests that Soros has a carefully planned agenda that he seeks to realize, step by step, in a secretive manner. And because the term is a compound noun, listeners can take the construct for granted.

Origo articles also frequently refer to the “Soros-network”²⁶ and identify various global or local actors who criticize the Hungarian government as “Soros-agents.”²⁷ Such terms also clearly evoke the global clandestine conspiracy frame in connection with Soros's name.

Excessive Power and World Domination

The anti-Soros frames activated in U.S. and Hungarian discourses often intertwine, combining, for example, the frame of clandestine conspiracy with that of excessive power and world domination. When Fox interviewed Nigel Farage in 2018, he exemplified this, saying, “The Open Society organization that he funds has already spent \$15 billion in

Trump himself tweeted that people protesting Brett Kavanaugh's nomination to the Supreme Court were “paid for by Soros and others.”

ing 17 Fox News depictions of Soros in the U.S. from the late 2000s onward with 90 anti-Soros articles published since 2016 by the Hungarian pro-government propaganda website *Origo.hu* reveals sig-

Soros conspiracy, and it's time we wake up, expose them, and stand up and fight for our country because that is what is at stake here.”²³

In Hungary, the clandestine conspira-

campaigning... This is an organized attempt, on a huge scale, to undermine nation-states, to undermine democracy and fundamentally change the makeup demographically of the whole of the European continent.”²⁸

Beyond ignoring the fact that OSF is not in fact run solely by Soros, the reference suggests that Soros wants to control Europe, the U.S., or perhaps the whole world—a widespread frame in the U.S. discourse. “Soros really does believe wealth controls culture. And he wants to really control the political scene in the United States and the media,”²⁹ argued one pundit. Glenn Beck doubled up on superlatives to highlight his claim that Soros basically rules the world, suggesting Soros “controls most of the most powerful.”³⁰ Another Fox host argued that Soros has the power to destroy anyone and everyone: “So you can see how powerful this guy Soros has become. He can smear anyone he wants in a variety of ways.”³¹

This frame is widely used in Hungary as well. Sometimes it’s explicit, as when an expert stated on public radio “George Soros wants to rule the world.”³² But more often, the idea is conveyed indirectly through framing, with references to the “Soros-empire,”³³ “Soros-world,”³⁴ the “Soros-lobby,”³⁵ and the “Soros-pact.”³⁶

The Puppet Master

While Glenn Beck used the term “puppet master” directly, this construct is more typically evoked as a frame in the U.S. discourse. “He is the real Wizard of Oz—the man behind the curtain,”³⁷ said one Fox guest, characterizing Soros

antisemitism.⁴⁰

The channel’s coverage also included charges that politicians and civil society actors were “being held in the pocket by a fabulously rich guy like George Soros”⁴¹ and “taking orders from the Soros group,”⁴² or that Soros “can demand that politicians running for office do what he tells them to do.”⁴³ Similarly, Fox speakers accused mainstream U.S. media of “basically tak[ing] exactly what Soros gives them and spit[ting] it out over the airwaves.”⁴⁴ Finally, Trump himself tweeted that people protesting Brett Kavanaugh’s nomination to the Supreme Court were “paid for by Soros and others.”⁴⁵

In Hungary, words that evoke the puppet master frame also emerge: “The Soros-network continues to pull the strings at the European Parliament”;⁴⁶ “The Soros-foundation has the European Commission on a string”;⁴⁷ “George Soros’s long arm reaches into the Dutch public TV”;⁴⁸ and “This is how George Soros traps Brussels [i.e. the EU] in a mesh.”⁴⁹

Hungarian anti-Soros rhetoric frequently appends a reference to Soros against anyone it targets, thereby activating the puppet master frame. Independent and opposition media outlets become “Soros-blogs,”⁵⁰ “Soros-media,”⁵¹ and “Soros-propaganda.”⁵² Political dissidents are portrayed as “Soros-activists.”⁵³ “Soros-university”⁵⁴ refers to Central European University, a prominent graduate school that was founded by Soros and was forced to leave Hungary in 2018. The term “Soros-money”⁵⁵ stands for OSF grants, while NGOs that

the “Soros-Sargentini report”⁵⁸ or simply the “Soros-report.”⁵⁹ And ships carrying refugees and migrants across the Mediterranean are called “Soros-ships,”⁶⁰ just as Hungarian pro-government media described Latin American refugees and asylum seekers traveling to the U.S. as the “Soros-express.”⁶¹

These hyphenated compound words, relying on the logic of nominalization, allow speakers to simultaneously discredit Soros and critics of the Hungarian government. By portraying Soros as a dangerous world-conspirator and suggesting that critics are puppets in his hands, pro-governmental figures and media can avoid engaging their arguments. It’s enough to associate them with Soros and unleash the power of ad hominem argumentation.

Far-Left Radicalism

Only one frame is limited primarily to one country: the frame of far-left radicalism, which is widely used in the U.S., but only sporadically—at least currently—in Hungary.

In the U.S. the frame of radicalism is sometimes deployed without reference to “Leftism.” On Fox News, Soros has been referred to as “an extremist who wants open borders,”⁶² a “wealthy radical,”⁶³ a “genuinely radical billionaire,”⁶⁴ and a “shadowy radical.”⁶⁵ Occasionally, he has even been discussed in the frame of terrorism, as when a Fox pundit declared that “he funds these things, as your chart points out, and open borders and even radical Islamic groups that defend suicide bombers.”⁶⁶

More often, he is specifically presented as a *far-left* radical, with descriptions on Fox that include a “socialist activist,”⁶⁷ a “far left billionaire,”⁶⁸ a “far-left finance guy,”⁶⁹ as well as “a man who wants to impose a radical left agenda on America.”⁷⁰ One host argued, “Soros wants a far-left country and will do what he has to do to financially get it.”⁷¹ Another claimed President Barack Obama “wasn’t socialist enough for Soros.”⁷²

This frame has also been employed in Hungary, but far less frequently. In 2018,

Ships carrying refugees and migrants across the Mediterranean are called “Soros-ships,” just as Hungarian pro-government media described Latin American refugees and asylum seekers traveling to the U.S. as the “Soros-express.”

as a manipulator working behind the scenes. Similarly, Fox News references to “the Soros-State Department unity effort”³⁸ and the “Soros-occupied State Department”³⁹ imply that Soros has secretly taken charge of U.S. foreign affairs. (The blatancy of the latter example forced Fox to respond to accusations of

have received OSF funding and criticize the Hungarian government are called “Soros-organizations.”⁵⁶ The term “Soros-list”⁵⁷ refers to Hungarian opposition parties. The report MEP Judith Sargentini presented to the European Parliament in 2018, which condemned Hungary’s anti-democratic turn, is now

Origo described anti-government protests as “The Soros-network’s far-left activists rampag[ing] through Budapest.”⁷³ A demonstrator taken into custody was identified “as an active member of the Soros-network” who was “responsible for the perpetration of far-left violence.”⁷⁴

Victimization

All the preceding frames support and reinforce another construction commonly used in both countries: the portrayal of Soros as a victimizer. A Fox quote discussed above—“This is a George Soros conspiracy, and it’s time we wake up, expose them, and stand up and fight for our country because that is what is at stake here”—set Soros against the entire population through the use of plural personal pronoun “we” and the possessive form “our.” Importantly, the reference to “our country” doesn’t merely construct Soros as a national enemy, but also excludes him, an American citizen, from the national community.

Such personal pronouns and possessive forms frequently cast Soros as a menace to the national community—and its key interests and values—in U.S. discourse. When one Fox host railed about Soros and “open borders,” she noted, “Sovereignty is out the window—all those principles we hold dear as Americans, they are subverted in that world.”⁷⁵ Another host charged, “He’s the extremely wealthy liberal billionaire who wants to take away your Second Amendment rights.”⁷⁶ Here, the possessive “your” implies that Soros attacks and victimizes not only the community as a whole, but its individual members too. Fox charges about Soros’s “anti-American agenda”⁷⁷ or how “he really hates [the U.S.]”⁷⁸ are also commonplace.

In Hungary, this frame is activated mainly through military metaphors. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have argued,⁷⁹ human thinking is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. Consequently, metaphors can powerfully shape our ideas about a particular object, in ways we may not consciously realize.

It’s therefore noteworthy that *Origo* metaphorically constructs Soros as an army commander, directing a military force of scholars, NGO workers, politi-

cians, and policymakers who criticize (or are simply independent from) the Hungarian government. Within *Origo*, such critics and rivals are called “Soros-soldiers,”⁸⁰ “mercenaries of Soros,”⁸¹ or the “Soros-army.”⁸²

Sometimes unrelated local and international political developments are associated with or attributed to Soros and discussed as military exercises. In this way *Origo* accused “the Soros-empire” of “occupying the Balkans,”⁸³ described a court ruling concerning a Syrian refugee as a “Soros-defeat,”⁸⁴ and depicted opposition parties’ electoral campaign strategies as Soros “deploy[ing] his local allies.”⁸⁵

Such metaphors not only present Soros as an aggressor but suggest that he specifically victimizes Hungarians, as evidenced by the *Origo* headlines: “George Soros’s mercenary troops continuously attack Hungary both at home and in Brussels”;⁸⁶ “Soros’s soldiers conspire against Hungary”;⁸⁷ and “Soros is not giving it up: he again targets Hungary.”⁸⁸

GLOBALISM AND ANTISEMITISM

Taken individually or together, this suite of frames don’t merely cast Soros in a negative light, but portray him as a powerful, shadowy, and ruthless conspirator who uses all the means at his disposal to extend his influence and subdue those who stand in his way. And the iconic figure of the culturally rootless, morally corrupt, and self-serving global investor resonates powerfully at a moment when national politics around the world are increasingly defined as a contest between globalists and nationalists.

Soros’s involvement in currency speculation (especially his infamous bets against the Thai baht and the British pound) allowed politicians to blame him not only for exploiting weak monetary policies but for ruining whole economies and triggering cascading events such as the Asian financial crisis of 1997. The same is true for his political interventions. Financial support from OSF to pro-democracy groups such as Otpor, a student organization that fought Slobodan Milošević’s authoritarian rule in Serbia, and OSF’s support in transferring know-how from Serbia to Georgia (where a sim-

ilar struggle ensued to unseat strongman Eduard Shevardnadze), established Soros’s reputation as a democracy-exporter. This gave authoritarian leaders the ammunition to deflect attention from their governmental records and cast Soros as a scapegoat for their countries’ problems.

The fact that Soros-the-investor and Soros-the-democratizer can’t be hermetically separated is all the more convenient, since it legitimizes rhetoric portraying the “open society” as just another ploy to dispossess and subjugate vulnerable populations. Soros, in other words, can easily be portrayed as a modern day colonizer, deploying modern mercenaries to open new markets for exploitation.

While in Eastern Europe anti-Soros discourse clearly draws on the historical legacy of foreign domination, it also feeds on antisemitism and, more particularly, the association of Jews with economic power and political influence. At times, the hatred directed at Soros is so intense that pundits and journalists have drawn a parallel⁸⁹ between him and Emmanuel Goldstein, the enemy of the totalitarian government in George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Reading Orwell’s description of the “Two Minutes Hate” against comments average Hungarians made about Soros to journalists in 2017⁹⁰ and 2018⁹¹ suggests that the parallel isn’t exaggerated:

Nineteen Eighty-Four:

“The Hate has started. As usual, the face of Emmanuel Goldstein, the Enemy of the People, had flashed onto the screen. There were hisses here and there among the audience. The little sandy-haired woman gave a squeak of mingled fear and disgust.”⁹²

Vox Pops, Hungary, 2017 and 2018:

“I don’t consider him a human being, let me just say this.”

“He has such a toad face.”

Nineteen Eighty-Four:

“...It was a lean Jewish face...”⁹³

Vox Pops, Hungary, 2017 and 2018:

“Dirty Jew.”

“George Soros is a peddler.”

“Judisch.”

Nineteen Eighty-Four:

"...the sight or even the thought of Goldstein produced fear and anger automatically."⁹⁴

Vox Pops, Hungary, 2017 and 2018:

"Cause I hate him."

"I hope he kicks the bucket before the elections."

"Cause if Viktor Orbán authorized me to shoot George Soros, I would go and just shoot him. That's it."

While these vignettes don't necessarily reflect the views of the majority of Hungarians, they highlight the power of the anti-Soros discourse to evoke antisemitic hatred and fear.

Soros, importantly, was not unknown prior to Fidesz's propaganda campaign. While his image in Hungary was far from homogeneous, he'd already been targeted by István Csurka, a leading right-wing intellectual who, as the head of the prominent *Magyar Fórum* weekly, played a preeminent role in reviving antisemitism in the post-socialist period.

Starting in the early 1990s, Csurka portrayed Soros as helping lead a globalist conspiracy (which he referred to as the "New York-Tel-Aviv axis"⁹⁵). In 1992, *Magyar Fórum* published a piece that accused Soros of seeking to colonize and exploit Hungary.⁹⁶ Although the party Csurka went on to found had relatively little success, his antisemitic ideas circulated widely, and were picked up by young intellectuals who would found the much more influential far-right Jobbik party. For Hungarians who bore the brunt of the transition to capitalism—and for whom Leftism was generally discredited—antisemitism offered another idiom besides nationalism to express deep-seated grievances with capitalism.⁹⁷ And for anti-liberal intellectuals and politicians, it offered an avenue for discrediting liberal opponents. Thus, although Fidesz shunned explicit antisemitism, it survived as a relatively influential counter-discourse on the Right, one that has historically often been combined with ethno-nationalism at moments when Rightist elites need popular support.

It's no coincidence that the five frames

we highlighted above also played a central role in antisemitic propaganda between the two World Wars and during World War II. This is also true in Hungary, where the revival of antisemitism after 1989, and its continued presence, energizes Fidesz's revamped anti-Sorosism and lends it credibility on the Right.

What's especially interesting about Hungary's current anti-Soros discourse is how its proponents have managed to tap into historically sedimented antisemitic clichés while avoiding accusations of antisemitism. Their main rhetorical strategy is to use Soros's name as a metonymy—a figure of speech where a specific word stands in for a larger idea—allowing them to claim that they aren't talking about Jews in general but Soros in particular, even as their references clearly evoke antisemitic tropes about rich and power-hungry Jews engaged in clandestine conspiracies.⁹⁸ Hungary's government has also developed friendly ties with its Israeli counterpart⁹⁹ and good relations with Hungary's Orthodox Jewish community, which it uses to parry accusations of antisemitism.¹⁰⁰

Though overt antisemitism may be less widespread in mainstream U.S. political and media discourses, the antisemitic dimension of U.S. anti-Soros campaigns is significant as well. In the U.S., anti-Sor-

interactions.

Paranoia is certainly not unique to the U.S. and Hungary. Anthropologists have argued that popular suspicions of power may be grounded in the nontransparent ways in which top power brokers operate, and the general lack of accountability that characterizes contemporary technocratic governments.¹⁰¹ Political theorists have similarly described how strengthening states' surveillance capabilities—rendering the ruled much more legible to the rulers while the operations of power become more opaque—generates paranoid political cultures.¹⁰²

However, what we have in mind is more specific, concerning how conspiracy theories can become the dominant means of legitimizing illiberal rule in highly polarized contexts. Polarization already became a key feature of U.S. politics under George W. Bush's War on Terror, and it has certainly not declined since Trump's election in 2016. In Hungary, extreme polarization began after a major political crisis in 2006,¹⁰³ when the socialist prime minister was caught in a leaked speech admitting that his party lied to win the elections,¹⁰⁴ and has since been exacerbated by Fidesz's authoritarian rule since 2010. Conspiracy theories like anti-Sorosism—positing that the sovereignty, health, unity, or even sur-

The never-ending conspiracy keeps core supporters agitated, ready to defend their country and leader.

ros rhetoric seems to reflect past purges against "anti-American" traitors. Besides evoking antisemitic tropes of Judeo-Bolshevism and the Communist conspirator Jew, the frame of far-left radicalism also activates historically embedded enemy-constructs, such as the memories of the first and second Red Scare (which also played on antisemitic imagery) and the Red Menace narratives of the Cold War.

OPPORTUNITY IN POLARIZATION

There is another, more universal parallel between the two countries: how anti-Soros discourse functions especially well in highly polarized political contexts where trust between rival political tribes has all but disappeared and paranoia has become the dominant logic guiding their

vival of the nation is threatened by invisible, powerful foreign actors—don't just evoke fear but establish a fundamental distinction between the friends and enemies of the people.

This Manichean worldview calls for a politics of securitization (including the deployment of emergency power, or even states of exception) and authorizes the harassment of internal enemies, as well as efforts to cripple or overtake democratic institutions that stand in the way of illiberal politicians. This is exactly what happened in post-coup Turkey and post-refugee crisis Hungary. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's efforts to purge his opponents and his successful bid to enhance presidential powers¹⁰⁵ have received much publicity. In Hun-

gary, the anti-Soros discourse has also been used to justify exceptionally harsh measures against asylum-seekers seeking to enter the country, while the “Stop Soros” legal package effectively criminalized humanitarian support for refugees.

However, such conspiracism is also effective in more routine electoral struggles. The figure of the foreign agent has anchored the electoral strategies of Erdoğan and Putin,¹⁰⁶ and more recently, Orbán. Their general strategy—to rely on an ideologically cohesive minority of core supporters, while keeping the opposition divided, and compelling independents to retreat into passivity—is served well by tales of a secretive enemy manipulating local puppets and always ready to strike. The never-ending conspiracy keeps core supporters agitated, ready to defend their country and leader. The atmosphere of paranoia that settles over the political community as a result of the “constant campaigning”¹⁰⁷ becomes contagious among supporters, but slowly infects even those who were initially

skeptical. Simultaneously, it profoundly repulses the unaffiliated. Yet this reaction may counterintuitively benefit authoritarian leaders too, as independents retreat from electoral politics.

Of course, authoritarian populist strategies that rely on the conspiratorial mode of reasoning also have their weaknesses. Supporters may grow tired of scapegoating, and a strong opposition with a persuasive program and sound strategy stands a chance of reawakening apathetic voters. To avoid this prospect, authoritarian leaders actively seek to discredit and divide in order to safeguard their rule. They promote conspiracy theories, creating situations in which opponents must compete instead of cooperating and deliberately downgrading politics into a mud-slinging contest. The dirtier the game, the better, since it deters people from entering the contest.

Opponents face the difficult tasks of recovering their credibility, forming credible and durable alliances, and reaching disaffected audiences. The whole process

resembles a vicious cycle. Once a certain depth is reached, it becomes difficult to avoid being drawn lower by the current.

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Soros, COVID-19 and U.S. Protests

The arrival of COVID-19 to Hungary in the first days of March presented the Hungarian government with a formidable public relations challenge. In the early days of the pandemic, Fidesz representatives made an effort to blame the pandemic on illegal immigration.¹ This communication campaign proved short-lived, as it quickly became clear that the main source of risk was instead Hungarians returning from work in Italy or holidays in Austria and because the public increasingly became concerned with addressing the pandemic instead of debating its origins. The government found itself in an uncomfortable position: having to prepare Hungary's chronically underfinanced health system for the looming crisis, deal with the pandemic's economic fallout, and convince an unsettled public that it knew what it was doing.

The adoption of the much-discussed, authoritarian “emergency” law in late March,² allowing the government to rule by decree, marked a turning point in the political response to the crisis. However, another three weeks passed without any sign of a major shift in governmental communications. The grand narrative of a nation besieged by refugees and the unholy alliance of George Soros and the European Commission had lost its resonance and there was nothing to replace it. Then, after Soros published an op-ed arguing for the introduction of “perpetual bonds” to fund Europe's economic recovery,³ Orbán happily revived the puppet master frame. On April 24, during his weekly public radio address, he argued that this “second Soros plan” was as dangerous as his earlier effort to bring millions of refugees into Europe, and that Soros's goal was to force the EU to take on expensive loans.⁴ The same day, pro-government media outlets began pushing stories on Soros's plan to profit from the crisis. Then, in early June, the government sent Hungarian citizens a questionnaire that mainly focused on the pandemic but also asked about Soros's “old plan” to let “migrants” into Europe as well as his “new plans” that could push “nations into debt slavery.”⁵

Meanwhile, in the U.S., after nationwide protests broke out over the police killing of George Floyd, right-wing media tried to place the blame on Soros.⁶ A guest on Fox News utilized the frame of clandestine conspiracy to argue that the protests bore “Soros' fingerprints.”⁷ Using familiar linguistic tools (such as the possessive form “our”), the speaker suggested that Soros “is the destruction to our civilization and a clear and present danger to our country,” and that he should be deported.

All this indicates that the language of anti-Sorosism won't vanish anytime soon, either in the U.S. or in Hungary.

– Anna Szilágyi and Kristóf Szombati

BY HILARY MOORE

Nothing Is Untouched:

The Aftermath in Chemnitz



Kraftklub, famous German band from Chemnitz, performs in the wake of 2018 right-wing demonstrations in front of a banner that reads "Stand Against Right-Wing Agitation – Solidarity Instead of Racism" on September 3, 2018. Credit: Stefan Müller/Flickr.

The sun was high and the air thick with a weighted August heat as we sat down for lunch at Schmetterling, a Persian restaurant in the heart of Chemnitz, Germany. Anne Gersch, a staff member of Courage, a project that facilitates anti-discrimination trainings in schools throughout the state of Saxony, recommended we meet there. She pointed to an adjacent street that a far-right anti-immigration group, PRO Chemnitz, had marched along during the regular demonstrations they held throughout the previous fall, in 2018. During one demonstration that September, Schmetterling's windows were smashed in—minor damage compared to the three other immigrant-owned restaurants attacked that year, but all echoes of the violent riots

that had made Chemnitz an international headline in the summer of 2018.¹

When a mob of 800 protestors took to the streets on August 26, 2018, with the declared mission to show "who has the say in the city," it made the news in Germany.² Videos showed hordes of protestors chasing down and attacking people they perceived to be refugees or immigrants.³ When 6,000 protestors turned out the following day, including members of far-right parties and groups, it made news around the world, and many international media accounts falsely portrayed Chemnitz as a city full of Nazis.⁴ A year later, people are watching Chemnitz and asking how the city became a hotbed of far-right organizing; what happened in the riots' aftermath; and how anti-racist organizing there is possible, amid lo-

cal and state governments that are shifting ever rightward.

Over lunch, Gersch and I talked about the likelihood that Germany's far-right party, Alternative for Deutschland (AfD), would gain power in the upcoming September elections. The AfD became the strongest party in Saxony in 2017.⁵ Notably, support for the AfD rose by two points after the racist riots in Chemnitz.⁶ She was concerned, but determined to stay. "It will be a really difficult five years, but I have no plans to leave," she said. "There are many of us who are staying and [who will] keep on working to discuss discrimination in our society."⁷

THE SPARK

Early in the morning hours of Sunday, August 26, 2018, a fight broke out

between men from a city festival near a popular kebab restaurant. Several were injured and one man, who would be identified as Daniel Hillig, died from stab wounds later that day. Two men were also taken into police custody as suspects: Yousif A., who had come to Germany from Iraq, and Alaa S., who had come from Syria. (Yousif A. would ultimately be released due to a lack of evidence, while Alaa S. was convicted in August 2019.)⁸

Later that morning, false rumors began to circulate that the victim, of Cuban-German descent, had died while protecting a woman the killer had molested and that a second victim had been killed.⁹ A far-right hooligan soccer fan club called Kaotic Chemnitz called for a demonstration that afternoon at the Karl Marx Monument in the city center. They wanted to show, as their social media accounts noted, “who is in the driver’s seat in the city.”¹⁰

The message spread quickly online, with the slogans “Our city, our rules!” and “Let’s show who has the last word in this city.”¹¹ Anti-refugee protestors began to convene. The 800 protestors vastly outnumbered the police presence at the scene (estimated variously as just 50 or 80 officers), and soon they moved from the city center into surrounding streets.¹² Small groups broke off and began chasing people they assumed were refugees or immigrants,¹³ continuing for an hour before dispersing.

PRO Chemnitz called for a demonstration the following day, posting an invitation on Facebook to anyone discontent with the impacts of immigration to German society.¹⁴ By Monday morning, the response to the post made it clear that this demonstration would be larger than Sunday’s. When it began that afternoon, Martin Kohlmann, the founder of PRO Chemnitz, spoke about the degradation of Germany society from the influx of refugees. He blamed the current government, alluding to its demise, and the change that an anti-refugee movement could bring. Soon, around 6,000 people took to the streets, far outnumbering the 591 deployed police officers and a smaller band of 1,500 counter-protestors, organized by the group “Chemnitz Nazi-

frei” (Keep Chemnitz Free of Nazis).¹⁵ As on Sunday, small groups broke out into the cityscape, “with many masked men hunting down foreigners,” as the UK think tank Institute of Race Relations reported.¹⁶

Far-right protesters from all over Germany, and neighboring countries, had traveled to Chemnitz to participate, according to local reporters. Among those present were local and regional far-right hooligan soccer fan groups such as Kaotic; representatives from the city’s far-right political parties, such as PRO Chemnitz and AfD (according to a local reporter); and nationalist parties from across Germany, such as The Third Way and the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD).¹⁷ State representatives from AfD traveled to Chemnitz, including AfD’s women’s organization, Frida (Frauen in der AfD), although they refrained from wearing party logos or symbols, according to an advisor with Kulturbüro Sachsen (Saxony), a Dresden-based organization that supports democratic education. Leaders within the far-right, anti-Islam PEGIDA movement, some of whom hold city council offices, were also in attendance. These formal brigades were also joined by everyday “angry citizens” or *Wutbürger*—a term now common in Germany to describe a particular kind of racism, where German citizens become outraged, and at times violent, in response to immigration issues.¹⁸

THE GAS BEFORE THE SPARK

The riots in Chemnitz were neither typical nor inevitable. Rather, argued Liz Fekete, director of the Institute of Race Relations, they reflected a continuation of fascist mobilizations with a deep history in Germany.¹⁹ “Chemnitz felt almost like a pre-pogrom, that if something didn’t happen very quickly [to stop it], it could have turned into another Rostock,” she said, referring to the 1992 incident where petrol bombs burned an asylum house for refugees while several thousand bystanders looked on, or even applauded.²⁰ Similar incidents took place in the German cities of Hoyerswerda in 1991 and Mannheim-Schönau in 1992, as neonazis from around the country joined local residents in attacking the

homes of refugees.²¹

In August 2015, this theme picked up again in Heidenau, where sieges against immigrant communities continued over several days with minimal response from the police.²² Fekete believes the revival of these kinds of attacks are, in part, a consequence of U.S. war policies and militarism. She argued, “In Europe, the main breeding ground for this [far-right violence]—is the Islamophobia that came out of the War on Terror and the [resulting] ‘refugee crisis.’ It fed the Far Right.” Increased migration from the Middle East and Africa to Europe in 2015 only exacerbated tensions, and the riots in Chemnitz became just one feature of rising far-right mobilization in eastern Germany, enabled by growing anti-refugee sentiment nationwide.

While the August 2018 riots were marked by the speed with which they came together and spread—in part due to social media—other, longer-standing far-right structures had already laid the groundwork in Chemnitz.²³

Danilo Starosta, an advisor with Kulturbüro Sachsen, traced the foundation of these structures to the traumas of national reunification after the fall of Communism. He described how little attention was given to transitioning a whole society from socialism to capitalism. This transition process did not account for the tensions and conflicts present in the German Democratic Republic that might then be leveraged. And that, he said, “enabled Nazi movements to grow and become strong.”²⁴ German reunification was also conducted on very nationalistic terms and at times privileged citizenship status to mostly Germans.²⁵ This seemed to affirm right-wing claims that nationalism is worthy of investment, Starosta explained.

On a very concrete level, as the capitalist society of West Germany began restructuring the East, the demolition industry boomed with new work in tearing down East German buildings and infrastructure.²⁶ Through this, large numbers of German men were ushered into Chemnitz as workers in the demolition industry. They worked together during the day and lived together in shared houses at night. This set-up, Starosta argues, was

an important part of developing neonazi structures in Chemnitz—self-organized neonazi houses that could spread

Correctness, No Thanks!), which went on to become one of the most successful far-right music labels in Germany. Located

role models.³¹ These politics reverberate around and within sports culture. The local soccer team, Chemnitzer FC,



An estimated 6,000 far-right protestors from around Germany descend on Chemnitz on August 27, 2018. Credit: De Havilland/Flickr.

ideology through work and home life.

These early associations later gave rise to more formal neonazi organizations, such as Blood and Honour, which expanded into individuals' social lives. For instance, since the 1990s, a new generation of *völkisch* settlers have moved to eastern states like Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, drawn by comparatively cheap land and the opportunity to set up nationalistic communities.²⁷ This, coupled with ongoing demographic collapse in rural regions of eastern Germany, correlated with neonazi activity in Germany's environmental movement. And the rustic image of rural living evokes the kind of lifestyle venerated by large strands of the Far Right today. But the neonazi lifestyle is not limited to the countryside. As Gersch explained, "As a Nazi, you have always had a good life in Chemnitz. You can go to concerts, have [public] discussions, work in Nazi-owned shops. There are economies for them." Within this culture, Gersch continued, different generations of Nazis work together.

Many of those who helped lead the 2018 riots came out of this city-based lineage. Among them was Hendrik Lasch, who in 2000 opened PC Records (Political

in a quiet residential neighborhood, the recording and distribution company is closely connected to Backstreet Noise/Trend Conscious, a retail shop that sells clothing synonymous with a neonazi aesthetic. These images and brands are commonly seen throughout Saxony. This establishment has done so well that the owner has been able to purchase other buildings to start new neonazi projects, such as an annual neonazi Mixed Martial Arts event called Tiwaz.

PC Records came under sharp criticism when a song they recorded, "Döner Killer," was featured in a video created by the National Socialist Underground (NSU), a terrorist organization responsible for killing 10 people—eight of them from Turkish backgrounds—between 2000 and 2007.²⁸ The NSU lived in hiding for 13 years, often in Chemnitz.²⁹

Another aspect of social life greatly influenced by far-right politics today is hooligan soccer fan clubs.³⁰ Groups such as Kaotic Chemnitz and New Society, also known as "NS Boys," are present in city life, and have been for a long time. Some members of NS Boys have said—or even stated publicly—that the disbanded club "HooNaRa," or violent Hooligan-Nazis-Racists, from the 1990s, are their

recently sparked a controversy when, before kick off, the stadium displayed a picture of Thomas Haller, the late founder of HooNaRa and a known neonazi, and some team officials, members, and fans, observed a moment of silence and a fireworks display to commemorate his death.³² This resulted in the team losing significant sponsorships. Later the team captain, Daniel Frahn, was fired for repeated, open support of neonazi groups.³³

Near the soccer stadium, in the neighborhood of Sonnenberg, interactions with neonazis take on a different tone. Mostly a low-income and immigrant neighborhood, families from different racial backgrounds share common space in the central park, called Lessingplatz. Disputes are common, said one local reporter, yet there seems to be a shared agreement based on necessity. Syrian families will play on the swings, while "table tennis neonazi families" enjoy the park tables. Still, this relative peace is demarcated by robust far-right infrastructure. Across the street from Lessingplatz is Power Games, a game store owned by a suspected neonazi that was raided in Saxony-wide investigations for weapons and evidence of supporting far-right terrorist

activity.³⁴ Witnesses reported seeing illegal firearms, which later spurred a police raid—the second raid in a year. The store

chat groups.³⁶ PRO Chemnitz, PEGIDA, the local AfD chapter, and Jan Timke, a Bremen-based state councilor and

it could be a dangerous place to live.” For Leftists, LGBTQ, punk, and working class people, especially those who attended



remains open today.

This level of far-right activism continues to be enabled by the willful ignorance of mainstream political parties like the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the governing party in Saxony, which has consistently denied the existence of a neonazi problem in the region.³⁵ Making matters worse, since the AfD gained seats in the national parliament in 2017, the CDU has consistently shifted rightward, attempting to recapture voters it lost to the far-right party.

THE AFTERMATH

After the 2018 riots, Chemnitz police came under sharp criticism for failing to address far-right violence—whether due to incompetence or collusion. On the morning of the first PRO Chemnitz demonstration, the *Verfassungsschutz*, Germany's secret service, sent notice to the Chemnitz police department, suggesting reinforcement, but the memo went ignored.

Later that week, Saxony's Justice Ministry confirmed that a prison guard had photographed the arrest warrant for Yousif A. and Alaa S. A local journalist would report that an image of the same documents was sent to far-right

prominent right-wing populist, circulated the warrant, and with it, the idea of Messermigranten or, "Knife Migrants"—a right-wing narrative that equates migrants with criminals. "When the state can't protect its citizens anymore, the citizens take to the street and protect themselves," wrote Markus Frohmaier, an AfD politician, on Twitter. "Today it is a citizen's duty to stop the deadly 'knife migration!'"³⁷ (This narrative is often coupled with the accusation that the *Lügenpresse*, or lying press, often misleads the public about the rate of criminal activity by migrants.)

"The police were derelict in their duties," said Liz Fekete. "When state institutions collude with violence, it doesn't have to mean that police officers are fascists directly. It could just mean that they are from the same milieu...[they] sit in pubs, have breakfast with relations from this mindset." In this way, Fekete asserted, what happened in Chemnitz is not limited to Chemnitz.

For people living and working in the city, the riots had an immediate impact. Gersch recalled that throughout Chemnitz, "we had the impression that you don't know what's happening tomorrow [and that]... this region is changing and

the counter-demonstrations, it was considered unsafe to return home after the riots.³⁸ Meanwhile, those perceived to be refugees or immigrants experienced an increase in assaults. André Löscher, a social worker with SUPPORT, which provides counseling to victims of right-wing violence, recalled that "Many people felt unsafe to go to the grocery store and children did not want to go to school."³⁹

At the same time, others chose to push back. Roughly a week after the violence, a free concert was organized by the local arts scene, with notable hip-hop and rock acts from across Germany banding together under the slogan, "There are more of us."⁴⁰ "It was a hopeful moment because the city felt so different. The city center was small shops and stages, dancing on the streets, music playing, all these big bands, all these democratic and antifascist people, antifascist slogans were shouted, people were happy," recalled Gersch. On stage, the lead singer of Kraftklub, a famous German band from Chemnitz, said, "We're not naive. We're not under the illusion that you hold a concert and then the world is saved, but sometimes it's important to show that you're not alone."⁴¹

That message would prove to be true.

"The city had a different feeling," said Gersch. "But it didn't stop the [far-right] demonstrations." For the next three months, PRO Chemnitz organized weekly demonstrations, with similar anti-immigrant messaging as the riots, in order to build the far-right voting base ahead of an upcoming election.

Controversy also broke on the federal level after the riots. Although the *Verfassungsschutz* had warned Chemnitz police about the seriousness of the demonstrations, Hans-Georg Maassen, head of Germany's domestic security agency, downplayed the violence that occurred, denying that far-right protestors had hunted refugees, despite credible video evidence.⁴² Maassen was also criticized for giving information to AfD representatives before a federal investigation began into the party's involvement in the riots.⁴³ Soon thereafter, he was forced to resign.⁴⁴ But this seemed to confirm a common criticism that Germany's security departments are "blind in the right eye."⁴⁵ Marco Wanderwitz, a former top official in the Federal Interior Ministry, admitted as much in *Spiegel Online*, noting, "We as the CDU in Saxony didn't look closely at right wing extremism for many years and didn't do enough about it."⁴⁶ Some politicians in the Left party *Die Linke*, like Martina Renner, took it a step further to charge that the history of the *Verfassungsschutz* has always shown "sympathies for the extreme right, hatred against the left and disregard for the rule of law."⁴⁷

The media came under criticism too. Before the 2018 riots, local press often evoked right-wing narratives in covering refugee issues, rarely reported on right-wing activity, or else did so uncritically—all factors that helped pave the way for far-right networks to flourish. After Chemnitz, local activists saw a change in how media began to cover both subjects. Others, such as Johannes Grunert, a local reporter in Chemnitz, have written about the corresponding rise in anti-racist community building.⁴⁸

But the threat remains. The riots and following weekly anti-refugee demonstrations created space for new neonazi organizations. In October 2018, police raided the homes of far-right activists in Chemnitz suspected of being members

of a new terrorist cell, Revolution Chemnitz. Eight men were ultimately charged with planning an attack on immigrants in Berlin, which was set to take place on October 3, the anniversary of German reunification.⁴⁹

On a more pedestrian level, there has been a sharp rise in everyday harassment, assaults, and provocation by people in far-right formations. In 2017, SUPPORT recorded 229 attacks in Saxony, many of which were race-related. In 2018, the number rose to 317, a 38 percent increase.⁵⁰ In Chemnitz alone, there were 20 incidents of far-right, violent, racist attacks in 2017; in 2018, there were 79. Notably, 64 of the 2018 attacks took place in the two months following the riots.

Many people, understandably, do not feel safe. "Some refugee and immigrant families are trying to move away from Saxony," said SUPPORT's André Löscher, although he noted that current migration laws restrict movement through residence requirements. While he said they'd been able to successfully get one family out of Chemnitz, more families are asking for help to leave.

While state-designated terrorist groups like Revolution Chemnitz pose a significant threat, many people in Chemnitz are equally concerned about the gains of the AfD in the September 2019 state elections. Kulturbüro Sachsen advisor Danilo Starosta believes that the riots illuminated the Far Right's battle for control of the government. In Chemnitz, for the first time, he said, "the Alt Right outed itself... The softest critics of asylum policy were unifying with the heavy, well-organized Nazi scene. They were together in public, sharing a common language."

That language, along with far-right culture and ideology, has become relatively normalized in Chemnitz, even as anti-racist and anti-fascist resistance contest their reach at every step. The neonazi networks from the 1990s either still exist, or have been replaced by new clubs and culture groups.

In the local elections in May 2019, AfD won three more seats on the city council, bringing the total to 11; PRO Chemnitz also gained a seat, for a current total of five.⁵¹ These gains put them on par with the conservative CDU, meaning that if

AfD and PRO Chemnitz form a coalition, they'll outweigh the ruling party.

"We all thought that people would see now what kind of party the AfD is," said Gersch, that "they are getting worse and more extreme." Instead, many people believe that the riots actually increased their popularity.

In this September's elections, the AfD gained again in state elections, becoming the second-strongest party in both Brandenburg and Saxony.⁵² With 37 seats in the Saxony parliament, the AfD has increased access to state funding as well as influence on every committee, including investigations. While every other party has agreed not to work with them, the prospect of a far-right alliance in local and state governments seems likely.⁵³ And longtime anti-racist organizations working within Saxony, like SUPPORT and Courage, are bracing for new challenges, such as struggles around state funding as state committees may favor organizations less critical of the Far Right to do victim support or educational workshops in schools.

In August 2019, a court convicted 24-year-old Alaa S. of manslaughter and bodily harm in the death of Daniel Hillig—the initial spark that set off the riots. The charge comes with a sentence of nine-and-a-half years. Defense lawyers have already appealed the verdict, citing a lack of evidence.⁵⁴ But close to two years after the violence, the struggle over what Chemnitz means continues. Who determines which people belong in Chemnitz or what Chemnitz should stand for? Is Chemnitz, so hospitable to the Far Right, a lost cause, or worth fighting for? The battle over these questions continues even as the international press has moved on. For many Chemnitz residents who have decided to stay, knowing what you're fighting for is just as important as knowing who you're up against.

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End Times Antisemitism:

Christian Zionism, Christian Nationalism, and the Threat to Democracy



Western Wall and Dome of the Rock. Credit: Sander Crombach/Unsplash.

I first encountered Christian Zionism—political support for the modern State of Israel grounded in beliefs about its prophetic significance in End Times scenarios—in 1992, while working as a fight-the-Right researcher in Portland, Oregon. A big part of my job was explaining the implications of Christian Right ideas and drawing out the connections between the Oregon Citizens Alliance (OCA), a local group best known for its anti-LGBTQ politics, and the broader program of the national movement. One critical element of that work was opposing a particularly anti-democratic OCA-sponsored initiative, Ballot Measure 9, which sought to amend Oregon’s constitution to require “all levels of government” to “discourage homosexuality” and prohibit the

inclusion of “sexual orientation” in any civil rights protections. It also sought to define homosexuality as “abnormal, wrong, unnatural and perverse.”¹ This ballot measure, in all of its obvious bigotry, was eventually rejected by Oregon voters, who shot it down in a 56 to 44 percent result.² But that outcome wasn’t a given in the year-long campaign preceding the vote—a period saturated with both anti-LGBTQ violence and vitriolic culture war rhetoric.³

The “No on 9” campaign focused on issues of fairness and legal equality, both of which were under attack by the Ballot Measure. And it was an urgent message in the final year of the Reagan-Bush era, when bigoted policies resulted in AIDS becoming the leading cause of death in U.S. men aged 25–44,⁴ and the first

same-sex marriage law was still almost a decade away.⁵ But it was also only a small part of the threat posed by the Christian Right, not just to LGBTQ or reproductive rights, but to the basic institutions of democracy. It was my job to help lead public education about the broader dangers of the Christian Right, and in that context, I often spoke at public meetings in partnership with rural LGBTQ and allied groups—to churches, civic organizations, anyone who would listen.

One such meeting was held at the Mittleman Jewish Community Center on Portland’s West Side. For the most part the audience responded enthusiastically to the fairness message. They could also see that the OCA was trying to impose a narrow version of a particular variety of Christian morality on the legal system.

But understanding how the Christian Right could be the enemy of democracy was more complicated.

"I understand the fairness issue," said one man in the audience, "but how much do we as Jews have to be worried about the Christian Right? I mean, they *are* strong supporters of Israel."

The question hung in the air. Then as now, the Israel/Palestine issue is an important one for many American Jews. As the resident expert on the Christian Right, the panel's moderator nodded at me to respond. Almost three decades later I remember the gist of my answer:

Yes, the Christian Right supports Israel. They see the establishment of the modern State of Israel as fulfillment of prophecies they believe to be necessary to the Second Coming of Jesus. They want to see the Temple rebuilt and for Israel to expand to control all of the territory described in Scripture. They believe a tiny minority of living Jews will, in the End Times, convert to Christianity and the rest will be damned to hell for their disbelief. They are, on those grounds, no friends of Jews.

I was making a point that is increasingly relevant in the Trump era: that untempered support for Israel's most reactionary policies is no bulwark against antisemitism, just as criticism of Israeli policy is no indication of such. Many in the room nodded their agreement. Even the man who'd asked the question seemed, if not exactly satisfied, to have something to think about.

But even then, I recognized that it was a partial response, because Christian Zionism is much more than a set of beliefs about the role of Israel and the Jews in the Second Coming, beliefs that are all too easy to trivialize for those who don't share them. Rather, Christian Zionism is part of a set of interlocking, theologically grounded beliefs about how Christians should engage with the political world.

Today, President Trump's administration is staffed by Christian Zionists at the highest levels, including Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.⁶ And adherents of the belief system form a key component of Trump's electoral base. Up to 81 percent of White evangelicals voted for him in the 2016

elections.⁷ Of that number only a slim majority, about 53 percent, unequivocally supported his recognition, in 2019, of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, but it would never be a make-or-break issue for doubters.⁸ For full-throttle Christian Zionists, however, the embassy move prompted comparisons of Trump to Cyrus the Great, the Persian king celebrated as a friend of the Jewish people for his decision to allow those in exile to return to

Untempered support for Israel's most reactionary policies is no bulwark against antisemitism, just as criticism of Israeli policy is no indication of such.

Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple.⁹

All this may be good for mobilizing the President's base, but it is deeply corrosive to any prospect for peace and regional stability in the Middle East. Nor, ultimately, are Christian Zionists separable from the broader Christian Right with its now decades-old plan to realign U.S. society with their particular version of Christian virtue, whatever the cost to democratic inclusion.

WHAT IS CHRISTIAN ZIONISM?

For the purposes of this article, Christian Zionism refers to a movement among Christians, mostly Charismatic and evangelical, whose interpretation of the Bible mandates their political support not just for the modern state of Israel, but an expansionist version thereof. The movement believes that the entirety of Jerusalem—particularly the Temple Mount, where they expect to see the Temple rebuilt—the Gaza Strip, the West Bank of the Jordan River, and the Golan Heights all rightfully belong to Israel: a biblical land-grant that doesn't merely fulfill a scriptural promise to the Jewish people, but stands as the cornerstone of Christian prophecies and as a sign that the End Times are close upon us. In other words, they claim the authority of religion in formulating a no-compromise position with respect to sharing land with the Palestinian people. Pastor Robert Jeffress, the Trump-aligned Baptist minister who blessed the relocation of the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, put it like this: "Jerusalem has been the object of af-

fection of both Jews and Christians down through history and the touchstone of prophecy. But most importantly, God gave Jerusalem—and the rest of the Holy Land—to the Jewish people."¹⁰

Jeffress's "touchstone of prophecy" comment is shorthand for the Christian Zionist belief that the establishment of Israel is a sign that prophecies are being fulfilled. It's a common belief among U.S. evangelicals, some 63 to 80 percent

of whom profess that the establishment of Israel in 1948 was the fulfillment of prophecy and an indication that the Second Coming is drawing near.¹¹ How near? According to one 2010 poll by the Pew Research Center, 58 percent of White evangelicals, and 41 percent of *all Americans*, believe that Jesus will "probably" or "definitely" return by 2050.¹²

Recent scholarly work on Christian Zionism has sought to complicate contemporary understandings of the movement, offering a more sympathetic and revisionist interpretation than the suggestion that Christian Zionism is exclusively driven by apocalypticism.¹³ Especially as presented in the popular press, this new scholarship denies the movement's underlying antisemitism and minimizes the influence of End Times prophecies and quid-pro-quo support for divine blessings, casting the movement as primarily about "mutual and covenantal solidarity."¹⁴ While this scholarship may be a necessary corrective to some easy generalizations, it focuses little on the most politically active Christian Zionist organizations today, especially Christians United for Israel, or its rapidly growing support among Charismatics.¹⁵

STRANDS OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

Politicized Christian Zionists fall into two broad theological camps: (1) premillennial dispensationalists and (2) Dominionist-influenced Charismatics, particularly those involved with the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement.¹⁶ While the contemporary move-

ment that finds so much prophetic significance in the founding of the modern state of Israel has its origins in the former, it is increasingly dominated by the latter. Megachurch pastor and televangelist John Hagee acts as a bridge between these two factions. Hagee, as head of the largest and most visible Christian Zionist group in the United States, Christians United for Israel (CUFI), does not claim NAR theology, but it's clear that many CUFI insiders have been NAR allies or part of that movement.¹⁷

Dispensationalism refers to belief in a progression of ages of the world in which the calendar of salvation is moved forward by pre-ordained events. In most dispensationalist accounts, we are currently living in the "Church Age," during which gentiles find salvation through accepting Jesus as their savior.¹⁸ Premillennial dispensationalists believe that Jesus must return before the establishment of his thousand-year reign on earth. Many premillennialists also believe that before the millennium, there will be a Rapture of the Christian faithful, whom God will transport, body and all, to heaven before a period of seven years called the Great Tribulation.¹⁹ The Tribulation, as described in Revelations, will include violent death that sweeps "over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth."²⁰ As Journalist Michelle Goldberg writes, premillennial dispensationalists also tend to "believe that God has a special plan for the nation of Israel, which will play a key role in the end of days and the return of Christ."²¹

In the first half of the 20th Century, premillennial dispensationalism and its associated beliefs often led to a kind of political quiescence—standing aside from worldly events and letting prophecy unfold. But beginning in the 1970s, a new leadership—largely drawn from the Charismatic movement or influenced by a radical theology known as Christian Reconstructionism—led to the formation of the panoply of new public education and lobbying organizations, including the Moral Majority, Christian Coalition, Traditional Values Coalition and others. Premillennialists, like many attracted to the Christian Right, were drawn by the

proactive character of Reconstructionist, or more broadly "Dominionist," ideas about the responsibilities of Christians in society. As PRA Senior Research Analyst Frederick Clarkson has argued, while Reconstructionism was itself a tiny movement, its influence in the broader evangelical world is hard to overestimate.²²

The second strand of support for contemporary Christian Zionism comes from the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR). The NAR is difficult to summarize in a few sentences. It is a diffuse movement within Charismatic and Pentecostal churches that typically includes vehement anti-denominationalism coupled with strict hierarchical discipline of

Christian Zionism bridges foreign and domestic politics in some unique ways that exacerbate both antisemitism and anti-Muslim bigotry.

individuals and whole churches to authoritarian "apostles." Many NAR beliefs and practices—including exorcism, "spiritual mapping" (coordinating prayer and ritual to expel demonic influences from a geographic region), and faith healing—invite mockery rather than analysis.²³

But far from being laughable, the NAR's "spiritual warfare" is deeply influenced by Dominionist thinking and actualized around a network of authoritarian leaders styled as "apostles" and "prophets" who, in many instances, insist on micromanaging the lives of their followers in ways reminiscent of and genealogically related to the defunct "shepherding" movement.²⁴ The potential for interpersonal abuse inherent in relationships that combine extreme hierarchy with unaccountable leadership was on display in that earlier movement.²⁵ These "apostolic" authorities, and the Dominionist imperative to Christianize otherwise secular institutions, combine to form a potent threat to democratic pluralism, as represented in the NAR-linked Seven Mountains campaign—a holistic model for the faithful to follow in taking control of not just state institutions, but media, education, business, and entertainment—all in service of forming an unabashed "Christian nation."²⁶

CUFI claims eight million members.²⁷

It's unlikely that the majority of that number are well-versed in the nuances of End Times theology, either in the dispensationalist or the NAR version. Theological consistency is largely the domain of thought leaders and religious professionals. But the opinions of thought leaders in this milieu, endlessly broadcast via Christian media networks and in the pulpits of megachurches, are in and of themselves significant.

WHY IT MATTERS: ANTISEMITISM

Christian Zionism is both like and unlike more familiar Christian Right culture war targets. As with LGBTQ rights or reproductive choice, the interpretive

contortions of movement leaders regarding Scripture are not the only reasons many Christian Zionists support Israel.

Christian Rightists who use Bible verses to justify anti-LGBTQ policies may also be motivated by homophobic bigotry; similarly, Christian Zionists who support Israeli state policies because of End Times prophecies might also be driven by anti-Muslim views. But Christian Zionism bridges foreign and domestic politics in some unique ways that exacerbate both antisemitism and anti-Muslim bigotry.

Often, the sort of antisemitism in Christian Zionism circles is obscured by the surface *philosemitism* of many in the movement and by the fallacy that what is nominally good for Israel is good for Jews. Since not all Jews are Israeli, and Jews have a wide range of political opinions about Israeli policies, the presumption that all U.S. Jews do, or should, support the current Israeli government is at base antisemitic. It follows the same political logic that led to the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, flowing from fear of their prior or higher ethnic loyalty to Japan than the U.S. It is also, of course, the contemporary form of a long-standing antisemitic trope, that by a more-or-less immutable nature, Jews are incapable of loyalty to a non-Jewish state.

For most of the years between the defeat of the Third Reich in 1945 and the election of Donald Trump in 2016, the “dual loyalty” slander about Jews has been confined to an explicitly antisemitic periphery of White nationalists. With Trump’s election, however, this is no longer the case. President Trump has repeatedly called into question the loyalty of U.S. Jews who fail to support his policies toward Israel, claiming they “don’t love Israel enough.”²⁸ Going further, in speaking to the Republican Jewish Coalition in April 2019, Trump referred to Netanyahu as “your Prime Minister.”²⁹

In an otherwise benign context, such statements might be taken as the partisan hyperbole of a President not known for his rhetorical constraint. Even when an average of 71 percent of U.S. Jews have voted for Democratic presidential candidates since 1968, if the only consequences were rhetorical, Trump’s statements could possibly be seen as mere excess.³⁰ But both U.S. policy in Israel/

VI civil rights enforcement agencies in the federal bureaucracy to consider “the non-legally binding working definition of anti-Semitism adopted on May 26, 2016, by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)” including “the ‘Contemporary Examples of Anti-Semitism’ identified by the IHRA.”³⁵ The “Contemporary Examples” include the controversial item “Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.”³⁶ Ken Stern, one of the authors of the IHRA definition, has suggested that the Trump executive order turns their words to a purpose they never intended—the regulation of campus speech. Stern writes, “This order is an attack on academic freedom and free speech, and will harm not only pro-Palestinian advocates, but also Jewish students and faculty, and the academy itself.”³⁷ Civil liberties advocates fear this definition will suppress any speech critical of Israel on campuses,

The importance of such a blessing looms much larger in New Apostolic Reformation circles, which believe these blessings can manifest as increased supernatural spiritual potency—leading to highly performative displays of support for Israel. In the words of Christian anti-NAR activist Holly Pivec, “NAR people often wear the Star of David on necklaces. They participate in Jewish religious feasts. They take pilgrimages to Israel, where they hold large prayer gatherings and blow shofars (a Jewish trumpet made of a ram’s horn). Some even move to Israel.”⁴³

Even among the NAR, however, some of the most popular preachers remain committed to prophetic apocalypticism. For example, Mike Bickle, one of the most prominent Christian Zionists linked directly to the movement,⁴⁴ is known for his assertion that, as a prelude to the End Times, a great many Jews will be rounded up and placed in “prison camps” and “death camps”—not in reference to the Holocaust, but to future actions that will

We see explicitly Christian Zionist organizations and megachurch pastors working with high administration officials such as Mike Pompeo, to justify expanding support for a right-wing, authoritarian Israeli government as the fulfillment of prophecy.

Palestine and on-the-ground violence against U.S. Jews suggest that Trump’s statements are both more than rhetoric and that his rhetoric is not only callous, but reckless.

Many of the most consequential Trump policies relating to Palestine/Israel are a continuation of long-standing, bipartisan U.S. support for Israel, which amounts to around \$3 billion in military and economic aid per year.³¹ There are, however, several Trump initiatives that have marked a significant departure from previous administrations. Key among these is the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the relocation of the U.S. embassy there,³² as well as recognition of Israel’s claim to the Golan Heights.³³ Then there is the administration’s decision to end U.S. contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the UN agency tasked with supporting Palestinian refugees.³⁴ On the domestic front, Trump issued an executive order charging Title

forcing university administrations to act as censors of students and faculty.³⁸

These breaks with previous policy have been interpreted by prominent Christian Zionists as part of a divine plan to hasten the End Times, as when Robert Jeffress declared of the embassy move, “We’re seeing prophecy unfold. I don’t know when the Lord is coming back, but I know today it got a little bit closer.”³⁹ Or when John Hagee, in October 2017, predicted that Trump’s campaign promise to relocate the embassy would likely happen that year “because God’s clock is ticking.”⁴⁰

In addition to discussing prophecies, Christian Zionists also understand U.S.-Israel through a transactional lens. Many point to Genesis 12:3, wherein God promises Abram, “I will bless those who bless you/And I will curse him who curses you.”⁴¹ For example, Hagee claims he told Trump that, “the moment that he really began to bless Israel, God would bless him in a very, very special way.”⁴²

be taken by followers of the Anti-Christ.⁴⁵ As horrific as Bickle’s prediction sounds, he takes an activist stance concerning the End Times, asserting, “The Tribulation is not something that happens to us. The Tribulation is something that happens through us.”⁴⁶

Similarly, in an infamous 2005 sermon, Hagee declared that Hitler and the Holocaust were predicted in Scripture and part of the divine plan to coerce Jews into moving to Israel.⁴⁷ While video of the sermon has since been scrubbed from the internet, in a transcript made by researcher-activist Bruce Wilson, Hagee preaches the distinction between “fishers,” who lure their prey, and “hunters,” who kill them outright. In this parable, Hagee suggested that diasporic Jews insufficiently enthusiastic about moving to Israel led directly to the Holocaust. That is, their failure to respond to the fisher, Hagee said, meant that, “Then God sent a hunter. A hunter is someone who comes with a gun and he forces you. Hitler was

a hunter.”⁴⁸

This quote, which Hagee has protested was “intentionally mischaracterized,” is often seen as the smoking gun for Christian Zionist antisemitism.⁴⁹ Like the Bickle discussion of hastening the Tribulation and Jews in death camps, these quotations help highlight just how bigoted Christian Zionist beliefs can be. But they also draw us so much into the trees that we miss the forest of antisemitic power, often presented in the guise of supposedly philosemitic policy—such as the embassy move or recognition of Golan Heights as part of Israel. Here we see explicitly Christian Zionist organizations such as CUFI, and megachurch pastors like Bickle and Jeffress, working with high administration officials such as Mike Pompeo, to justify expanding support for a right-wing, authoritarian Israeli government as the fulfillment of prophecy.⁵⁰ The closeness of this relationship should give us pause, leading as it has to condemning the majority of U.S. Jews as disloyal, allying our country with the most authoritarian and reactionary elements in Israeli politics, and justifying further escalation of tensions in the wider Middle East.

WHY IT MATTERS: ANTI-MUSLIM BIGOTRY

The Christian Zionist logic that calls on the U.S. to unconditionally support Israeli policies simultaneously reinforces the adversarial stance toward the Muslim world that has been on display since 9/11. Some Christian Zionist leaders have long supported war with Iran and general belligerence toward the Islamic world. Here the language is often much less guarded, with Hagee referring to Iran as the “head of the snake” with “a theology based on suicide and mass murder,”⁵¹ and NAR “prophet” Chuck Pierce declaring that Islam “is controlled by satanic principalities and powers.”⁵² Within the NAR, such claims aren’t rhetorical devices, but accusations of actual demonic possession.⁵³ And Christian Right leader Pat Robertson, also a Christian Zionist, has made similar accusations, holding that “Militant Islam is motivated by the devil.”⁵⁴ In fact, journalism professor Eric Gormly found in an analysis of Robertson’s flagship *700 Club* program that

references to satanic and demonic influence in Islam were commonplace in the post-9/11 era.⁵⁵

As with antisemitism, anti-Islamic bigotry is a fluid construct, adaptable as a technique of power. During the Obama administration—alongside aspersions about the president’s citizenship and Christian faith—anti-Muslim groups like ACT for America focused on the threat of terrorism and on the supposed spread of Sharia law in the United States.⁵⁶ According to Steven Fink, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire professor of philosophy and religious studies, “American Christian Zionist leaders connect Islam categorically with violence.”⁵⁷ For example, John Hagee has written that “Islam not only condones violence; it commands it.”⁵⁸

It is usually White Nationalists and their ideologically adjacent friends in the Trump administration who are associated with conspiracy-tainted claims about invading foreigners and the hidden forces that egg them on.⁵⁹ These claims are usually grounded in antisemitism. Sometimes this is explicit, as for the Pittsburgh and Poway synagogue shooters. More often, flowing from the admin-

Christian Zionist organizations are thus in a feedback loop relationship with the Trump administration, watching their allies get appointed as insiders who are then validated by constituent activism.

istration staff or Fox News, the antisemitism is ever-so-slightly veiled, taking the form of accusations against Jewish philanthropist George Soros or unnamed “globalists.”⁶⁰ In the case of Christian Zionism, antisemitism and anti-Muslim bigotry go hand-in-hand. American Jews who criticize Israeli policy or see themselves primarily as U.S. citizens are accused of disloyalty. According to Christian Zionist thought, they promote the cosmopolitan, anti-nationalist ideas of Soros, supporting the mass entry of culture-destroying immigrants, including Muslim immigrants intent on undermining White Christian civilization.

For Christian Zionists, U.S. Jews who refuse to participate in their prophetic fantasies and economy of curses and

blessing are an obstacle to God’s plan. Christian Zionists like Lt. Col. (Ret.) Robert Maginnis, a former senior fellow of the Family Research Council, and Stephen Strang, the leading publisher of Charismatic and Pentacostal media, echo the language of White nationalists, giving it their own twist. Like their more secular colleagues, they paint Soros as the wellspring of all manner of “globalist” and “cultural Marxis[t]” attacks on the nation. At the same time, their unwavering support for right-wing Israeli policies serves to shield them from accusations of antisemitism. As S. Jonathan O’Donnell, a postdoc in American Studies at University College Dublin, has argued, “Christian Zionist anti-globalism cannot be classified as straightforwardly antisemitic, nor fully divorced from it.”⁶¹ That shield, however, is something they wield against the political preferences of a majority of U.S. Jews.

The Christian Zionist stance toward Muslims is not nearly so nuanced. Muslims are constructed largely as an undifferentiated enemy, not just through the blurring of right-wing Israeli interests with those of all Jews and all Americans,

but as cultural invaders bent on undermining U.S. culture and society. This is largely in line with positions taken by the U.S. Right more generally, including the anti-Muslim group ACT for America.⁶² Christian Zionists add their signature apocalyptic voice. In an article titled “The Coming Fourth Reich,” Hagee writes:

America has been invaded by an invisible army of millions who intend to destroy this nation. They aren’t coming to America; they’re already here. This army of radical Islamic extremists have poured across our open borders and are waiting patiently for the hour of their unified attack, designed to bring chaos and governmental collapse.⁶³



Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visits Israel during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pictured here standing six feet from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on May 13, 2020. Credit: U.S. Embassy Jerusalem/Flickr.



Vice President Mike Pence visits the Western Wall in Jerusalem on January 23, 2018. Credit: U.S. Embassy Jerusalem/Flickr.

CORROSIVE TO DEMOCRACY

Christian Zionism is politically opportunistic, mobilizing both antisemitism and anti-Muslim bigotry in ways calculated to capitalize on the fears of the moment. This opportunism is wedded to shifting interpretations of prophecy. In his book *Beginning of the End: The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and the Coming Antichrist* (1996), Hagee interprets the prophetic significance of the 1995 assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Rabin's role in the Oslo Accords, in Hagee's interpretation, led to the possibility of his assassination being used as an excuse to double-down on peace. He wrote, "based on the words of the prophets of Israel, I believe this peace process

will lead to the most devastating war Israel has ever known. After that war, the longed-for Messiah will come."⁶⁴

By 2016, of course, it wasn't an imminent war that was signaling the close arrival of the Messiah, but rather Trump's relocation of the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.⁶⁵ Such convenient interpretive moves must not be reduced to a penchant for charlatanism. Between Rabin's assassination and the embassy move, Hagee built CUFI into a juggernaut with millions of members and staunch allies in the Trump administration, including Vice President Pence and Secretary of State Pompeo. So, when CUFI takes credit for the embassy relocation, it's more than boasting. Through one-on-one meetings with both Trump and Pence, Hagee stressed the move was important to his constituency—a claim backed up by 137,000 supportive emails from CUFI members to the White House.⁶⁶

Christian Zionist organizations are thus in a feedback loop relationship with the Trump administration, watching their allies get appointed as insiders who are then validated by constituent activism. Pence has not only spoken at CUFI events, his public statements put him firmly in the camp of Christian Zionism.⁶⁷ Pompeo is similarly committed to Christian Zionist principles and has aligned himself with CUFI.⁶⁸ While there is no religious test for holding high office in the United States, such public support for a cause so openly biased, by the very people responsible for guiding U.S. foreign policy, is cause for the gravest concern. At the very least, such positioning undermines the capacity for the U.S. to

engage in peace-making not just in Israel/Palestine, but more broadly.

At a deeper level, the influence of the Christian Zionist movement on both foreign and domestic policy poses a challenge to the democratic process itself. Democracy, in the best sense, is not merely the will of the majority, or competition between constituencies, but the temperance of such competition by fundamental rights. These include religious freedom, but not the freedom to impose religious belief or practice on others. The apocalyptic rhetoric of Christian Zionists and their exaggerated claims of prophetic certainty—recall Hagee's claim about "millions" of Muslim invaders bent on destroying the United States—demonstrate how they hide behind democratic claims (like freedom of speech or religion) even as they shamelessly attack the rights of others. They wield the democratic process of constituent mobilization in causes shot through with bigotry.

Moreover, democracy only functions inclusively when decision-making criteria are transparent. Practices of prophetic interpretation, orientation to the End Times, and the transactional chasing after supernatural blessings are anything but clear to the vast majority of people in the United States. With Trump in the White House and Christian Zionists as core members of his policy team, this is an ignorance the rest of us can no longer afford to sustain.

Assistant Research Director at Political Research Associates, Steven Gardiner started researching and writing in opposition to the politics of bigotry, violence, and authoritarianism in the early 1990s. In 2004 Gardiner received a PhD in cultural anthropology from Cornell University for his work on military masculinity and conscientious objection in the German military. He has taught more than 20 different courses at eight universities in the United States, Pakistan, and the UAE. Selected publications include *"In the Shadow of Service: Veteran Masculinity and Civil-Military Disjuncture in the United States"* (North American Dialogue, 2013), *"Behold the Man: Heroic Masochism, Militant Christianity, and Mel Gibson's Passion"* (Cultural Analysis, 2013), and *"White Nationalism Revisited: Demographic Dystopia and White Identity Politics"* (Journal of Hate Studies, 2006).

The Right in the Streets:

The Past and Present of the Polish March of Independence



The red glow of marchers' flares during the annual Polish March of Independence in Warsaw on November 11, 2019. Credit: Piotr Kocyba.

In the early afternoon on November 11, 2019, in central Warsaw, tens of thousands of people came together at the Roman Dmowski roundabout, for an event known as one of the biggest right-wing gatherings in the world. The location itself was telling: named for an influential Polish thinker who espoused ethno-nationalistic and openly antisemitic ideas.¹ From 2012 on, this is where the March of Independence has begun. After the national anthem and speeches, the crowd slowly started the roughly two-mile march, which, due to the sheer number of participants, can take up to four hours, as marchers cross the Vistula River and make their way to a large open space behind the Polish national stadium, where a final rally and closing concert take place. The spectacle

was a sea of flags and banners in Poland's national colors—white and red—flown by a wide spectrum of participants, ranging from openly right-wing radicals and masked hooligans, to families with toddlers, to senior citizens, most generally representing the middle or even upper-middle classes.

The demonstration had a notably martial atmosphere, as marchers' flares cast a red glow across the city; loud firecrackers echoed off building walls; and participants belted classic stadium chants popular with football fans and hooligans: "First with a sickle, then with a hammer, hit the red rabble";² "From trees, instead of leaves, communists will be hanging";³ or "Not red, not rainbow, but national Poland." Other chants were more aggressive yet. The 2019 march landed amid a

public campaign in Poland—run by organizers of the march—called STOP 447, aimed at a U.S. law requiring reporting on the restitution of Jewish property that was "wrongfully seized or transferred"⁴ during the Holocaust (and sanctioned by the subsequent Communist rule).⁵ Consequently, alongside Polish flags and banners, marchers carried promotional material for STOP 447, and many participants chanted the baldly antisemitic slogan, "Here is the real Poland, not Polin [Hebrew for Poland]."⁶

This is what a street event organized by the Far Right but attended mostly by the middle-class looks like in Poland today.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MARCH

Poland gained its Independence in 1918, after the end of World War I. Col-

lapsing empires and the rise of nation-states enabled a long awaited independence, previously lost in 1795 due to Poland's partition between Prussia, Russia, and Habsburg. Under Communism, Independence Day was revoked as an official national Polish holiday because it was linked with the pre-World War II government, which the post-war Communist regime derided as "bourgeois." Democratic opposition activists organized illegal celebrations anyway, most often under the protection of the Catholic Church with commemorative masses.⁷ But in 1978, participants of the holy masses took to the streets and joined illegal marches in Warsaw and other Polish cities. In 1981, when the anti-Communist Solidarity movement was briefly legalized, around 100,000 participants were counted across Poland. (Technically, those marches were still illegal but were condoned by the state due to the large numbers participating.) Although Solidarity was again banned by the end of 1981, the marches took place throughout the 1980s, regularly causing fights

NATO. So, while the new government sanctioned official Independence commemorations, the far-right alternative marches suggested that Poland's sovereignty was threatened by its aspirations to join international organizations. In 1996, Warsaw saw its first such march, organized mainly by the small, far-right organization National Rebirth of Poland (Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski).¹⁰ (In 2013, this group gained international publicity for disturbing a lecture given by one of Europe's most influential sociologists, Zygmunt Bauman, at the University of Wrocław.¹¹)

For years, the marches continued to attract few participants and little media coverage. But this began to change in 2008, when a group of around 150 counter-demonstrators protested the Warsaw march, forcing it to change its route.¹² The controversy stoked passion and interest, leading to a growing number of participants in subsequent years, as well as increasing coverage by mainstream media, which condemned march organizers as radicals and fascists.¹³ State

pendence Day.

In 2011, the March of Independence Association was formed as the result of a union¹⁷ between two important far-right organizations: the All-Polish Youth [Młodzież Wszechpolska] and the National-Radical Camp [Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny], both of which trace their roots back to the inter-war period and share a nationalistic, anti-Communist, anti-EU agenda.¹⁸

Other right-wing groups supported the new, unified march, including Solidarni 2010, a grassroots movement fighting for the "truth" about the plane crash that killed Polish President Lech Kaczyński (among other representatives of the Polish state), and Kluby Gazety Polskiej, a group associated with a Polish weekly magazine known for its homophobic, Islamophobic, and anti-EU agenda. Both are closely linked to Law and Justice's conservative agenda. Other prominent right-wing figures also supported the new march, including Janusz Korwin-Mikke, a former deputy of the European Parliament famous for his sexist and rac-

These alternate marches focused on ultra-nationalist messages, promoting anti-European Union, antisemitic, or anti-NATO views, at a time when post-Communists controlled the government, and were advocating for Poland to join the EU and NATO.

between the participants and Communist security forces.⁸ After the collapse of Communism in 1989, the Third Polish Republic reintroduced Independence Day as a national holiday, with commemorations that usually included a Catholic mass and speeches from officials, and which were observed mainly by the state authorities and the political elite.

At the same time, in cities across Poland, right-wing (often skinhead) groups, such as the now sidelined Polish National Community (Polska Wspólnota Narodowa), began holding their own, competing events, with local-level Marches of Independence that drew modest numbers of participants.⁹ These alternate marches focused on ultra-nationalist messages, promoting anti-European Union, antisemitic, or anti-NATO views, at a time when post-Communists controlled the government, and were advocating for Poland to join the EU and

authorities began to heavily police march organizers and activists,¹⁴ inadvertently helping the event grow further. As Jan Bodakowski, a right-wing blogger and activist who participated in the 2010 march recalled:

On a grim day on November 11th, nationalists gathered on Castle Square in Warsaw. Those who wanted to take part had to pass through a tight police cordon surrounding the demonstrators. For many days, the left-wing media, mostly *Gazeta Wyborcza*,¹⁵ were calling for the March to be blocked. The effect was different from that expected. Instead of being another small nationalistic event, ignored by everyone, it has become a widely-discussed matter of state.¹⁶

Starting in 2010, a single, large march in Warsaw replaced the smaller regional events, and this joint march became the primary issue of debate over Polish Inde-

ist statements,¹⁹ and the journalist Rafał Ziemkiewicz, who in 2018 was blocked from speaking in the UK over protests that accused him of hate speech.²⁰ (For instance, Ziemkiewicz recently stated, "We have to shoot LGBT! Not literally, of course—but we have to fight it."²¹) With the participation of more moderate right-wing groups and activists, the event grew dramatically and soon began to attract tens of thousands of participants.

As the march grew, so did attempts to block it, sometimes leading to violence. In 2011, fights broke out between march participants on one side and counter-demonstrators and anti-fascist activists (many from Germany) on the other. Marchers set fire to a news van belonging to liberal television station TVN24,²² and members of both sides attacked the police, leaving 40 police officers injured, 14 police cars damaged, and 210 people arrested.²³

The violence continued in subsequent years. In 2012, a masked group of marchers again attacked the police. In 2013, violent marchers burned down an art installation in central Warsaw representing

2016 and 2017 marches, for example, President Andrzej Duda addressed participants in an official letter, read aloud on his behalf at the start of the event:

In the mutual respect and dignity of

Seeking to capitalize on the demonstration's popularity, Law and Justice party leaders defended the event against accusations that it was a fascist rally, and party members regularly joined the march.

LGBTQ-rights,²⁴ attacked an illegal anarchist squat,²⁵ and burned a sentry booth in front of the Russian embassy. In 2014, during clashes with marchers, 51 police officers were injured and over 270 people were detained.²⁶ Yet the number of participants seemed to steadily increase. Although estimates vary depending on who's doing the counting, between 2013 and 2015, more than 50,000 people were said to have taken part each year.

This impressive mobilization was recognized by far-right organizations and political parties, but also by Jarosław Kaczyński's ruling right-wing Law and Justice party (PiS). Seeking to capitalize on the demonstration's popularity, PiS leaders defended the event against accusations that it was a fascist rally (while simultaneously attempting to marginalize the organizers and distance themselves from antisemitic messages), and PiS members regularly joined the march.

In 2015, after PiS won the presidential and parliamentary elections, opportunities for the party to support the march increased. March organizers had long blamed counter-protestors and the police for disturbances in previous years.²⁷ After PiS took power, the police presence at the march became virtually invisible, as officers concealed themselves on side streets, behind buildings, and under bridges. As a consequence, violence has decreased significantly,²⁸ even though marginal acts of vandalism still occurred, like the burning of the European Union flag.²⁹

Although the media acknowledged the decrease in violence, they also criticized the government's involvement as a thinly disguised romance between the ruling party and the Far Right, whose support PiS seemed to be courting. At both the

this holiday, we gather under white and red flags and images of the White Eagle. Together and each in their own way, we make use of the most precious good—our freedom. I really want—and I know that this expectation is shared by many Poles—that these good feelings and the message of today's holiday will accompany us all every day.³⁰

With this official welcome, the March of Independence crossed over into the political mainstream, even as some participants still broadcast White nationalist messages, including banners in 2017 that read, "Pure blood, clear mind," or "White Europe of Brotherly Nations."³¹ This reality prompted Guy Verhofstadt, the liberal former prime minister of Belgium, to condemn the event as "60,000 fascists march[ing] in the streets of Warsaw—neo-Nazis [and] white supremacists."³² In response to Verhofstadt's criticism, Bawer Aondo-Akaa, a Polish anti-abortion activist, sued him.³³ Aondo-Akaa, who had participated in the March, was born to a Nigerian father, and uses a wheelchair—facts he would argue in his lawsuit to "prove" the march was not racist, and therefore couldn't be described as neonazi. The case remains open as of this writing.

THE CENTENNIAL MARCH ENTERS THE POLISH MAINSTREAM

In 2018, march organizers promoted that year's event with the slogan "March of the Million on the Centenary," reflecting their hopes to attract one million marchers on the 100th anniversary of the nation's independence. However, that year the celebrations came amid a political atmosphere even tenser than usual, due to steps taken by the president, the mayor of Warsaw, the government, and

nationalist groups.

President Duda proposed having a joint march, in which he and some government officials would participate along with the far-right organizers. This sparked massive criticism from liberal and Left mainstream media, politicians, and organizations,³⁴ which accused the government and PiS of making common cause with right-wing radicals.

Efforts to organize this joint march failed after Duda insisted that marchers should only carry Polish flags—a clear effort to ensure that racist and White supremacist banners would not be visible at an event led by the president. On October 29, two weeks before the event, a spokesperson for the President and the Speaker of the Parliament announced separately that neither the President nor any PiS politicians would take part in the March of Independence.³⁵

On November 7, four days before the event, Warsaw then-Mayor Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz intervened to try to stop the March, claiming that there was a serious threat of public disorder and violence during the event.³⁶ The mayor's decision went before the courts, and Duda invited Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki to discuss the matter to find a way to save the event commemorating Poland's 100th Independence Day.

The same day, without waiting for the court's decision, Duda announced that the March of Independence would be replaced by an alternative "White and Red" March, which, as an official state event, was beyond the power of Warsaw's mayor to prevent. Organizers of the March of Independence interpreted the announcement as an attempt to take over their event and decided to march anyway, regardless of the president's plans.

The next day, November 8, the district court overruled the mayor's decision, citing insufficient justification for her canceling the march and the public's right to freedom of assembly.³⁷

This rapid sequence of events, which happened almost overnight, led to heightened public emotions and fears of disorder. In the end, there were two Independence Day marches in Warsaw on November 11: the so-called presidential or White and Red March, which had the

status of a state celebration, and the nationalists' annual event.

The result was the largest event in the history of the march, as approximately 250,000 participants took to the streets of Warsaw, according to the Polish Po-

two large radical organizations, the All-Polish Youth and the National-Radical Camp—broke apart, with the latter criticizing march organizers for indulging PiS demands, cooperating with security forces to prohibit radicals from entering

ment in October 2019 with 11 deputies (representing 6.81 percent of votes), PiS has started to fight back against its new competitor. And since that competing party is closely tied to the organizers of the march, the marchers whom PiS once welcomed into the mainstream have since become its political enemies.

The outcome at the march in November 2019 included complaints that march organizers and activists were harassed by police intelligence officials,⁴¹ despite the fact that policing of the march has remained low-key and official state media continues to cover the event enthusiastically, highlighting marchers' patriotism and minimizing allegations of radicalism. On the other hand, the visual appearance of the 2019 March bore a greater resemblance to the mainstreamed centennial march than those that had come earlier: Polish colors dominated, there were fewer visible fascist symbols, and the march was hailed as the least violent to date. (However, its martial atmosphere—of flares, firecrackers, and aggressive chants—remained unchanged.)

Only the future will show whether the March of Independence—now competing both against a more moderate PiS and the farther-right activists of the National-Radical Camp—will continue to be one of Poland's biggest street events and one of the world's largest right-wing gatherings.

Piotr Kocyba works on illiberal social activism. His research interest began with a survey and participatory observation during a PEGIDA demonstration in Dresden. PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of Europe) is the most successful right-wing protest movement in post-war Germany. Piotr is now leading a research project that surveys protestors in Poland, focusing mainly on the little-studied right-wing demonstrations.

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An estimated 250,000 people participated in the two near-simultaneous marches, resulting in one of the world's largest right-wing gatherings. Credit: Konrad Lembcke/Flickr.

lice.³⁸ Both marches followed a nearly identical route, and took place at nearly the same time, meaning that even though the presidential march started first, many participants weren't sure which event they were taking part in. In the end, because the presidential event had heavy security, only around 3,000 people were able to take part in the official, state-organized march.³⁹ Most people, intentionally or not, participated in the nationalists' March of Independence.

the march, and generally being too mainstream.⁴⁰

Second, PiS began distancing itself from the march and its organizers, sensing that the potential for mobilizing march supporters into PiS voters was outweighed by the risk that another party might recruit them instead. Indeed, this is exactly what happened shortly after the 2018 march, when two right-wing parties, the National Movement (Ruch Narodowy) and KORWiN (established by

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DEVELOPMENTS AFTER THE CENTENNIAL MARCH OF INDEPENDENCE

Despite the confusion surrounding the centennial march, the event was a huge success in terms of mobilization, media coverage, and further mainstreaming. But this triumph came at a price. First, the coalition of organizers—led by

the aforementioned Janusz Korwin-Mik, a politician closely tied to the march), fused into a new radical-right party called Confederation Liberty and Independence (Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość). This new party, called Confederation for short, quickly grew into a serious threat to PiS's absolute majority. Recently, after Confederation entered the new parlia-

BY MADDALENA GRETEL CAMMELLI

Third Millennium Fascism:

Highlights from Italy



CasaPound official band ZetaZeroAlfa on May 26, 2012. Credit: grigioscuro/Flickr.

The annual spring Salone Internazionale del Libro in Turin is not just a book fair, but one of Italy's most important cultural events: five days of debates, book presentations, and discussions with writers from Italy and around the world, featuring countless publishers' stands spread across the Lingotto exhibition hall. But in May 2019, the fair instead offered a barometer of the tensions Italy was facing surrounding the resurgence, or continued presence, of fascism in the third millennium. For days, news headlines focused on the book fair, but not, this time, because of its programming or talks. Rather, the media's attention stemmed from the fact that a new publisher had been allowed to exhibit at

the event: Altaforte Edizioni, a recently established publishing house directly associated with CasaPound Italia (CPI), the political movement whose activists define themselves as "fascists of the third millennium"—a modern continuation of Italy's fascist history. Italian antifascists, intellectuals, and writers protested the inclusion of Altaforte¹ and the Auschwitz-Birkenau museum of Poland threatened to withdraw its participation.²

Altaforte's books mainly revolve around a revisionist history of Italian fascism, and the publishing house intended to use the fair to launch a book profiling far-right politician Matteo Salvini, federal secretary of the League (formerly the Northern League party) and,

at the time, Italy's Minister of Interior. With the book's publication, an alliance emerged at the public level linking Salvini's League with CPI.

This episode wasn't the first of its kind, but it unquestionably changed the level of institutionalization and general acceptance that neofascism has been able to secure in modern Italy. And that mainstreaming was largely thanks to CPI, a movement and political party born in Rome in 2003.

THE HISTORY OF CASAPOUND ITALIA

The CasaPound movement emerged in 2003, when a group of young activists occupied a seven-story building in downtown Rome with the declared intent of opposing what they defined as

the “usury” of the Roman rental market.³ This word, “usury,” was an explicit reference to the term used by American poet Ezra Pound in his *Cantos*, denouncing the banking system. The movement saw Ezra Pound—perhaps the most prominent U.S. literary figure to embrace fascism, via a critique of the banking system based in antisemitic conspiracism⁴—as its mentor, and their name reflected a dual reference: on one side, their attention to the housing (“Casa”) crisis in Italy, and, on the other, their adoption of Pound’s name to denounce the banking system. CasaPound was an integral part of the Fiamma Tricolore political party, one among the galaxy of right-wing parties founded after an Italian political crisis in 1994.⁵

The building they occupied was located near Rome’s Termini railway station, in an ethnically diverse neighborhood populated mainly by Chinese and Bengali immigrants—a fact that led them to declare the building the “Italian Embassy.” It wasn’t the only building they occupied; several years later, members of the group also occupied an abandoned former train station, which they called “Area 19, Postazione Nemica” (“Area 19,

The innovation CPI seeks to inject into the world of neofascism isn’t a specific policy program so much as a new way of doing politics.

Enemy Position”) and used for concerts and other public events. The activists were eventually evicted from Area 19 in 2015, but the group held on to its “Italian Embassy,” which is still occupied by movement activists and today serves as both the group’s organizational headquarters and its symbolic home.

In 2006, CasaPound activists established Blocco Studentesco, a branch devoted to forming collectives in high schools and universities and presenting candidates for student government elections. In 2008 the group broke with Fiamma Tricolore and CPI became an independent association with offices in many major Italian cities.⁶ Five years later, in 2013, CPI participated for the first time in local elections (after becoming an



CasaPound headquarters, originally occupied by activists in 2003 and still in use by the movement today. Credit: b. n./Flickr.

independent political party in 2012).⁷ In the Lazio regional elections in February (the region of which Rome is the capital), it obtained 0.8 percent of the vote.⁸ In local elections in Rome that May, the same Casa Pound candidate received 0.6 percent.⁹ In 2016 these numbers almost doubled, to 1.14 percent of the vote in Rome,¹⁰ and as high as 6 percent in other cities such as Bolzano,¹¹ and as high as 8 percent in Lucca in 2017,¹² enabling the party to place several delegates on municipal councils. But in the administrative election of 2018, CPI got just 0.95 percent of the vote,¹³ and in 2019, the party disbanded, reverting to an independent movement with a focus on influencing far-right youth culture, via publications, clothing brands, and music.¹⁴

A POLITICAL AND CULTURAL PROGRAM

CPI’s political agenda incorporates many points central to the fascist tradition,¹⁵ including a focus on housing and the group’s proposed *Mutuo Sociale* legislation, which would grant Italian families who have resided in their region for at least five years the right to home ownership by building new housing.¹⁶ The proposed legislation also features a provision to nationalize the country’s

banks, justified by the charge that bankers and their families—allegedly always tied to foreign multinational corporations—constitute the core cause of social injustice in Italy. CPI’s political platform is clearly inspired by Benito Mussolini’s 1943 “Manifesto of Verona.”¹⁷ While they have eliminated explicit references to the racist policies of the epoch,¹⁸ their original written agenda contained an entire paragraph copied verbatim from the Manifesto (although they don’t present it as a quote).¹⁹

In terms of its political style, CPI has succeeded in modernizing many of the proposals already present in the legacy of Italian neofascism. Most striking is the attention it grants to communication²⁰ through multiple channels, including social networks;²¹ its construction of an original and novel language; and its use of provocative media campaigns, such as *squadrismo mediatico* or “media squadrism” (discussed more later). The innovation CPI seeks to inject into the world of neofascism isn’t a specific policy program so much as a new way of doing politics. As their neofascist guru Gabriele Adinolfi has said: “push away everything that is far right, and take back everything that is fascist.”²²

Alongside its political platform and presence, CPI also grew as a cultural

movement largely based around the Oi! punk rock band ZetaZeroAlfa, whose members were among the first to occupy CasaPound's "Italian Embassy." ZetaZ-

scend yourself," and a matter of destiny in which "preserving that community is like preserving your own life."²⁷

The process of becoming involved in

he led a group of around 20 CPI activists in attacking young protestors with iron bars while wearing motorcycle helmets, injuring many.³⁵ Polacchi spoke to po-

While in the past fascist rituals consisted of militaristic parades and marches, among third millennium fascists, music, concerts, and even a shared fashion assume that role.

eroAlfa's frontman, Gianluca Iannone, leads both the musical group and the political movement, and CPI as a movement largely developed around the band.²³ If the "Italian Embassy" is where the movement started, CPI's second occupation in Rome, "Area 19, Enemy Position"—what Albanese calls the "temple" of ZetaZeroAlfa²⁴—became the site where the community has been able to meet, take shape and grow. While the station was occupied, it played a central role in the third millennium fascist movement, hosting meetings and concerts alike.

Within the movement, there's a focus on hierarchy and obedience, virtues that activists interpret as absolute trust in the rightness of their leader. There's also an element of ritualized violence—something very much in keeping with fascism's sacralization of violence and emphasis on militarized masculinity. During ZetaZeroAlfa concerts, an interesting phenomenon called *Cinghiamattanza* occurs. The term derives from one of the band's songs, which describes fighting with belts, and when it's performed, CPI activists remove their belts and hit each other with them,²⁵ as the lyrics encourage them to do: "*Cinghiamattanza! First, I take off my belt;/ Two, the dance begins /Three: I aim well;/ four cinghiamattanza.*"²⁶

This expression of "symbolic violence," as one CPI sympathizer termed it, is perhaps best understood as an expression of activists' deep commitment to the movement. Far from just filling out a ballot in a voting booth, their participation has powerful existential value. For them, CPI is experienced first and foremost as a community of struggle, and belonging to it is a matter of lived experience in which sacrificing one's life for the community is naturalized. As one CPI activist explained to me, "It's a way of experiencing things that naturally leads you to tran-

the CPI community unfolds through the same kind of dynamics described by George Mosse²⁸ in relation to the "new politics" of the Third Reich, wherein rites and rituals help generate and grant structure to the political agenda.²⁹ While in the past such rites consisted of militaristic parades and marches, among third millennium fascists, music, concerts, and even a shared fashion³⁰ assume the primary role of rituals that spread the leader's authority through song lyrics.

INTERACTION WITH THE LEAGUE

The electoral success of the League since Matteo Salvini became federal secretary in 2013, and Salvini's later appointment as Minister of the Interior (a position he held from March 2018 to August 2019), is only the latest development to attest to the speed with which fascist culture is spreading and constructing a new consensus.³¹ Salvini had repeatedly demonstrated his friendship with CPI, both through a formal alliance (called *Sovranità*) the League made with CPI in 2015, as well as through less-institutional public displays of kinship.³² In 2015 for example, Salvini was photographed having dinner with CPI leaders;³³ after the spring 2018 elections, he attended a football

match on CPI's behalf, and YouTube videos of the incident reveal officers' seeming familiarity with him, as they called him by his first name.³⁶ At the time, Polacchi headed CPI's school-based branch, *Blocco Studentesco*. And the year before the demonstration, in 2007, Polacchi had been accused of attempted murder as a result of a violent clash in Sardinia.³⁷ (Ultimately, the statute of limitations for the crime expired in 2017.³⁸) But despite that history of violence, Polacchi was among the CPI leaders present at the dinner with Salvini and owns and manages the Pivert clothing brand through which Salvini signaled his enduring support.³⁹

CONCRETE VIOLENCE AND "MEDIA SQUADRISM"

When controversy erupted over CPI's presence at the Turin book fair, Polacchi declared that the journalist who'd first condemned their participation was "a moral instigator" whom he'd hold responsible for "any aggression against *Altaforte Edizioni* at the *Salone*."⁴⁰ Polacchi's thinly veiled threat was published in major Italian press outlets, enabling CPI to use the media to intimidate its critics.⁴¹ The same was true of a declaration Polacchi made outside the fair after protests

Violence, in this perspective, is not only a tool for building group identity and a sense of belonging, but also a tool for gaining visibility, appearing on newspapers' front pages, and seizing a space of power.

led to his being banned from entrance. "I'm fascist. Antifascism is the real problem of this country,"⁴² he said in a statement that was quoted uncritically by the press.⁴³

Declarations and threats like these are central to CPI's longstanding strategy of what they call "media squadrism." In Italian, "squadrismo" has a specific his-

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torical connotation, referring to the violence the Fascist “blackshirts” committed in the early 1920s to suppress their political opponents and gain power.⁴⁴ CPI third millennium fascists have not hesitated to claim this legacy as a source of political identity and historical legitimization, giving direction and meaning to its acts of violence.⁴⁵

Just as in the 20th Century, the contemporary diffusion of fascist culture and political mobilization is closely linked



Anti-fascist protest art featuring Matteo Salvini, taken on December 14, 2019. Credit: duncan c/Flickr.

to two distinct but parallel elements. On one side lies violence as a practice, connected to a concrete past that’s been transformed into a foundational mythology. Violence, in this perspective, is not only a tool for building group identity and a sense of belonging, but also a tool for gaining visibility, appearing on newspapers’ front pages, and seizing a space of power. It is a strategy for provoking fear and taking concrete steps in the pursuit of power.

On the other hand, there are concrete links to institutional power through the political support CPI has received since its inception. Matteo Salvini is only the

latest institutional figure to lend CPI his explicit support. In 2009, Paola Concia, a well-known Partito Democratico parliament member, took part in a CPI-organized debate on LGBTQ issues, helping grant the group legitimacy.⁴⁶ Additionally, after CPI first occupied its so-called “Italian Embassy” in 2003, no Roman mayor, from either the Center-Left or the Right, attempted to reclaim the building for 16 years. (In 2019, finally, the city’s new mayor, Virginia Raggi of the Five Star Movement, made a tepid suggestion to take the building back, but it wasn’t acted upon. To date, the building is still occupied by third millennium fascist activists.) Likewise, CPI as an organization has suffered no consequences for its members’ repeated acts of violence,⁴⁷ including a 2011 massacre in Florence, in which a CPI sympathizer killed two Senegalese migrant workers and injured three more before killing himself.⁴⁸ Although the episode drew public outrage, journalists and politicians—notably including Mayor of Florence Matteo Renzi—parroted CPI’s defense that the killer was mentally ill.⁴⁹ Press outlets only denounced the massacre as a racist act, never pointing out its ties to fascist thought—particularly fascist idealization of violence as sacrifice by a movement martyr—and failed to denounce the killer’s connections with CPI ideology and organizing.

In recent years, CPI’s continued focus on fierce anti-immigrant and anti-refugee sentiment, as the movement has organized countless demonstrations in front of refugee centers, has led to further acts of violence. In 2016, a Nigerian refugee was beaten to death by a CPI sympathizer in Fermo, a small town in central Italy, who’d insulted the victim’s wife by calling her an “African monkey.”⁵⁰ In 2018, a massacre almost broke out in nearby Macerata when a neofascist activist from the League shot all the Black people he encountered on the street, injuring six.⁵¹

Despite these incidents, CPI has continually evaded repercussions for its activists’ actions.

In 2016, the group escaped consequences in the civil court system as well, when a lawsuit was brought against CPI by Ezra Pound’s daughter, charging that

the movement had misappropriated her father’s name to advocate violence. The judge in Rome who heard the case, however, declared that CPI’s name was sufficiently distinct from Pound’s, and that “it did not legitimate the use of violence under the poet’s name.”⁵² That verdict was supported by a 2015 letter from the Ministry of the Interior and Office of the Prefect of Police, which described CPI activists as motivated by “a manifest and declared wish to support a reappraisal of fascism’s most innovative aspects” and a “primary engagement for protecting the poor.”⁵³ The letter acknowledged the episodic violence that surrounds CPI but blamed it on “so-called militant anti-fascism,” which refused to recognize CPI’s “right to engage in political activity.” It was the same argument, delivered from on high, that Francesco Polacchi would make in Turin in 2019: casting CPI violence as strictly defensive, and blaming anti-fascists for any conflicts that arose from his movement.

What happened in Turin last year is just one example of how Italy’s fascist past is resurging in the present moment, granting meaning and identity to neofascist activists, and taking up concrete political space across Italian society. These developments go far beyond individual debates about the existence of a movement, group, party, or publishing house. What’s at stake is the way in which Italy confronts—or fails to confront—its own past, and how that past is now permeating deeply into Italian society, shaping it according to its own image.

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Right-Wing Populism Outside the Global North:

Brazil and the Philippines



President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines and President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil Credit: Ace R Morandante/Wikimedia Commons and Alan Santos/Flickr.

Over the last several years, countries including the U.S., UK, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, and Spain have witnessed the rise of authoritarian leaders and the return of politicians posing as defenders of the “will of the people.” Right-wing populism is back in fashion worldwide, but the reasons for its ascension aren’t the same everywhere. In the Global South, Brazil and the Philippines have elected national populist presidents and offer an opportunity to understand the development of such trends in different social and economic backdrops.

In their 2018 book, *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy*, Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin analyze two political episodes in 2016

that were propelled by national populist movements: the election of Donald Trump in the United States and the United Kingdom’s “Brexit” referendum about leaving the European Union. The authors lay out four elements—the “four Ds”—intrinsic to the emergence of national populism that were evident in both episodes: the electorate’s *distrust* of politicians and institutions; fears about the potential *destruction* of national identity and ways of life; a sense of economic *deprivation* relative to other societal groups; and the *dealignment* between voters and mainstream parties.

These trends set the stage for rising populism and having them as parameters helps identify what populist movements across the globe have in common

and what sets them apart. And far from being limited to countries like the U.S. or UK, these historic shifts are also found in contemporary Brazil and the Philippines. The way Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and his Filipino counterpart Rodrigo Duterte operate bears many similarities to right-wing populists in the Global North. However, the distinct socio-economic backdrop they are embedded in necessitates adaptations to the populist playbook.

The fact that immigration—which fuels much populist anger in the U.S. and Western Europe—is not a major concern in Brazil or the Philippines, for instance, means that Bolsonaro and Duterte must tap other concerns to amass popular support. And as two young democracies

that emerged from dictatorships in the 1980s, with comparatively weaker institutions, these two populist leaders have implemented policies with more sinister results, from the arrest of journalists to the political persecution of members of the judiciary to mass police killings.

To understand the phenomena that

ing stipends for housing, clothing, trips, and staffing, that difference increases eightfold,³ making Brazil's Congress the second-most expensive globally—trailing only the U.S.—with each federal legislator costing U.S. \$7.4 million annually.⁴ Despite this, the quality of public services lags far behind those in de-

veloped economies, fueling the public's reproach of the political establishment. Endemic corruption, which is also more acute in the Global South, has also nurtured popular distrust toward mainstream politics. Although individual malfeasance has been a perennial problem in Brazil, an onslaught of scandals involving prominent businessmen, bureaucrats, and politicians has outraged

ranked poorly in global corruption perception surveys.⁷ The nation has one of the highest income tax rates in Asia⁸ but its social services and healthcare system leave much to be desired. In recent years, traffic in the capital city of Manila has so deteriorated that it became a focus of the 2016 presidential election, mirroring the public's clamor for improvements in public transportation and infrastructure.

Like populists elsewhere, Duterte's and Bolsonaro's firebrand discourse have helped shape their image as unorthodox candidates who can overhaul corrupt, oligarchic regimes and give voice to the public's aspirations.

boosted Duterte and Bolsonaro to power—and which may elevate other right-wing populists in developing countries—it's paramount to analyze how they fit into the global populism puzzle.

EXPLOITING DISTRUST

There are many reasons for the global disconnect between nations' political establishments and their electorates.

Against the backdrop of unpopular political elites, populists can find their way to power by posing as outsiders in their rhetoric. Like populists elsewhere, Duterte's and Bolsonaro's firebrand discourse have helped shape their image as unorthodox candidates who can overhaul corrupt, oligarchic regimes and give voice to the public's aspirations.

In Brazil, Bolsonaro won the presidency in 2018 by running as an outsider, despite having served seven terms as a congressman.⁹ Over his 28 years in office and in the lead-up to his campaign, he praised the military dictatorship that ruled the country from 1964 to 1985, expressed support for torture,¹⁰ and argued that police officers should not always be prosecuted for civilian deaths during law enforcement operations.¹¹

Among his most controversial statements,¹² the retired army captain simulated machine-gunning his opponents; suggested that a community of Black Brazilians, who are descended from enslaved people, were livestock; said that Indigenous people have no culture and are "increasingly becoming human beings";¹³ told a congresswoman she didn't "deserve" to be raped; and declared himself a proud homophobe¹⁴ who would rather any son of his be dead than gay.



Bolsonaro styles himself as the "average Brazilian," appealing to middle class Brazilian voters. Photo taken November 1, 2015. Credit: Família Bolsonaro/Flickr.

Among them, Eatwell and Goodwin note, are the higher levels of education and income that separate politicians from their voters.¹ Those disparities are exponentially higher in the Global South. In Brazil, a member of Congress earns 32 times the minimum wage.² Consider-

the public for the past six years. What started as a money-laundering probe in 2014 involving petrol stations and car washes morphed into one of the biggest anti-corruption operations in the world. The continuing Federal Police investigation, known as "Car Wash," has re-

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's leap into politics also came on the heels of dictatorship in the mid-1980s, when he was appointed vice-mayor of Davao City, and sought to clean the streets of systemic corruption and criminals linked to the illegal drug trade.¹⁵ His campaign for the presidency 30 years later, on an anti-crime and -corruption platform,¹⁶ was similarly colored by curveball remarks, with Duterte joking about raping a missionary and riding a jet-ski to the South China Sea to defend sovereignty,¹⁷ and boasting about riding a motorcycle

power is with the president."²⁶

The president has the final say in budgetary matters, is capable of using bureaucratic technicalities to oust chief justices—as Duterte²⁷ and his predecessor Benigno Aquino III²⁸ both did—and has the means to go after dissidents within government.²⁹ Institutions forced to act as referees, like the Supreme Court, end up in the crossfire of polarized political battles, further undermining democratic values.

"Lawfare,"³⁰ or the use of the legal apparatus in political disputes, is also on

government subscriptions.³⁵ He later retreated amid backlash from civil society organizations and a lawsuit charging that the move was unconstitutional.³⁶ Bolsonaro has since directly attacked the paper's reporters and barred them from covering events he attended.³⁷ In 2019, the press was attacked 11,000 times per day on Brazilian social media, according to a study on threats to freedom of expression by the Brazilian Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters.³⁸

In the Philippines, government-backed tax violation and cyber-libel lawsuits against journalist Maria Ressa and Philippine news website *Rappler*,³⁹ as well as threats to not renew a Philippine TV network's⁴⁰ operating license, exemplify Duterte's repression of an independent press. The worst incident to date was the 2019 arrest of Ressa, *Rappler's* Executive Editor, for cyber-libel, among other charges.⁴¹ In 2019, the Freedom for Media, Freedom for All Network found that Filipino journalists faced at least 154 incidents of attacks and personal threats since Duterte's election.⁴²

On top of these obvious attacks on the free press, both Duterte and Bolsonaro resorted to well-structured social media operations that spread misinformation and heightened public distrust of the media by labeling factual journalism as fake news.

Bolsonaro's election bid was boosted by a Whatsapp social media campaign wherein public relations agencies—illegally paid for by right-wing businessmen—spread misinformation to millions of people online, as reporting by *Folha de S. Paulo* revealed, and multiple subsequent studies⁴³ and analyses confirmed.⁴⁴

Duterte used Facebook in a similar fashion. According to a 2016 investigation by *Rappler*, in the lead up to the Philippines 2016 election,⁴⁵ Duterte's campaign paid trolls to spread misinformation and amplify their message. The campaign later admitted the practice and acknowledged they continued with the operation months after Duterte's election, to influence public opinion and strengthen support for his agenda.⁴⁶

Cambridge Analytica, the now-defunct British political consulting firm implicated in both Russia's meddling in the

Bolsonaro and Duterte, along with Donald Trump, France's Marine Le Pen, and Hungary's Viktor Orbán, all use the free press as a punching bag and sow distrust toward journalism and other pillars of liberal democracies.

and shooting criminal suspects dead.¹⁸ In 2016, he was elected to a six-year term with 39 percent,¹⁹ or 16 million²⁰ votes, shocking the global political arena.

Duterte's rhetoric resonated deeply among the country's newly rising middle class,²¹ which saw in his braggadocio, sleazy jokes, and brutal frankness one of their own.²² "His populism is more street-type," said political analyst Ramon Casiple, executive director of the Manila-based advocacy group Institute for Political and Electoral Reform. "He thinks like the man on the street. That's the mayor in him...He can make a statement today and the next day set it aside; he doesn't want to be predictable."²³

Political analysts in Brazil point out that Bolsonaro's campaign had a similar strategy. From seemingly improvised live broadcasts on social media to wearing casual attire to formal events, he strived to appear like an average Brazilian, whom voters could identify with.²⁴

TARGETING INSTITUTIONS

Power in the Philippines has been concentrated within the executive branch since the collapse of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986.²⁵ "We've come to a situation where every politician wants to be the president. Nothing else. Not even vice-president, not even senator," Casiple noted. "Because the money and the

rise in Brazil, as the number of challenges to Bolsonaro's decrees and decisions brought before the Supreme Court has reached record levels.³¹ The increasing involvement of the judiciary in political affairs, a trend that has been going on for years,³² upsets the balance between the three branches of government. In one of his latest controversies, in March 2020, Bolsonaro called on the public to attend street demonstrations against the Supreme Court and the Congress, and in favor of his administration. (He eventually backtracked due to concerns of mass gatherings amid the COVID-19 outbreak but later attended the demonstration and took pictures with supporters.)³³

Such direct attacks on democratic institutions connect Bolsonaro and Duterte to other world leaders among the global Right, including U.S. President Donald Trump, French far-right leader Marine Le Pen, and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. All five use the free press as a punching bag and sow distrust toward journalism, another pillar of liberal democracies.

In September 2019, Bolsonaro mimicked Donald Trump in labeling mainstream media "the enemy."³⁴ That October, also following a move by his American counterpart, Bolsonaro picked a fight with national newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, announcing the cancellation of

U.S. 2016 election and for harvesting political data from millions of Facebook users, has conceded that it used Duterte's social media strategy as a blueprint for Donald Trump's 2016 U.S. presidential campaign.⁴⁷

DESTRUCTION

In the Global North, populists have prospered by playing to people's perception that their way of living and national identity are threatened by newcomers from abroad. Inciting anti-immigration sentiment among portions of the middle class hurt by globalization is leveraging what Eatwell and Goodwin describe as the sentiment of destruction among voters.

As immigration is not a major political

threatening the idealized national identity he pledges to protect.

In both Brazil and the Philippines, rising violence, crime, or drug use had inspired generally unsuccessful promises of change from previous federal and local governments, prior to Bolsonaro⁵⁴ and Duterte.⁵⁵ Some of the problems are real. In 2017, for example, Brazil recorded 63,880 murders⁵⁶—a rate of violent deaths six times higher than that of the United States.

Some of the problems, on the other hand, are exaggerated. Duterte's campaign leveraged Filipinos' fears⁵⁷ that crime and drug use were rampant, and exacerbated those concerns by inflating data for drug addiction in the Philippines—classifying people who admitted

they have fear of theft, robbery, being laid off.”⁶³ Duterte's presidential run tapped into this wellspring of fear, economic insecurity, and instability.

DEPRIVATION

The economy also plays a role in the populist agenda, which plays out in distinct ways in developed and developing countries. Heydarian⁶⁴ argues that the current political scenarios in Brazil and the Philippines can be described as “emerging market populism,” as they have different causes than more mature democracies and operate in institutional environments with comparatively fewer checks and balances.⁶⁵

In societies where inequality proliferates, the middle class grew frustrated

The failure of political elites to provide quality social services, safer streets, or to meet the demands of those lifted out of poverty led many to begin doubting the efficiency of the political system as a whole, and to consider trying something different.

issue in the Global South, populists there have had to adapt this strategy. They urge radical solutions to longstanding social ills, like crime and drug dealing, to appeal to a public fatigued by traditional politics that have failed to solve such problems. Arguing that the population is currently worse off than in the past, Bolsonaro praises the military regime by claiming that there was less corruption, more economic prosperity, and safer streets back then.⁴⁸ These are all questionable arguments, but by tailoring populist tactics to the local reality, he evokes a sense of destruction of an idealized past among his voters.

Bolsonaro has also pledged to govern in favor of a so-called traditionalist majority, in a reference to his mostly White, rich, socially conservative, Christian support base.⁴⁹ When he says that in Brazil “minorities have to bend down to the majority,”⁵⁰ he is pointing fingers at Left/liberal social movements in favor of gender equality, LGBTQ rights, affirmative actions for Black communities, and the protection of Indigenous populations. Instead of scapegoating immigrants, Bolsonaro's implicit argument is that feminists,⁵¹ human rights activists,⁵² and non-governmental organizations⁵³ are

to using drugs just once as “addicts.”⁵⁸ Relying on inflated statistics, the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency suggested that 92 percent⁵⁹ of Metro Manila's villages had a drug problem; Duterte promised that if he won, “change [was] coming.”⁶⁰

In these ways, both politicians argued that a safe and orderly way of life was under threat, in order to crystallize support nationwide. Filipino scholar and political analyst Richard Heydarian describes Duterte's base as Filipino workers from the emerging middle class, including many in the business outsourcing sector, who have worked in the Middle East and Gulf regions to support families back home.⁶¹ As members of this new middle class reach better living standards, argues political science scholar Arjan Aguirre, they place greater value on disposable goods—a tangible proxy for their improved way of life—and become more impulsive, paranoid, and fearful of petty crimes. The prospect of criminals or drug addicts looking for money appears as a threat to not just their property, but their precarious new status.⁶²

“The mindset of the new middle class is different,” said Aguirre. “Because they own disposable material goods [now],

with policies favoring the poor over their interests.”⁶⁶ In Brazil, socioeconomic improvements achieved in the 2000s stagnated in the following decade, then plunged, between 2014 and 2016, as the country faced one of the worst recessions in its history,⁶⁷ sending 4.5 million⁶⁸ people back into poverty and fomenting social unrest. Approval ratings for sitting politicians cratered,⁶⁹ creating a void ready to be filled.

Bolsonaro spoke to a society hurt by economic decline and spiking unemployment. The sense of relative economic deprivation was disseminated in ways similar to those in the U.S. and the UK, where neoliberal policies led to increasing levels of income and wealth concentration, as Eatwell and Goodwin argue.⁷⁰ In Brazil, affirmative action developments in the 2000s, both for Black students⁷¹ entering federal universities and in new income redistribution programs aimed at elevating the nation's low-income population,⁷² generated resentment among the middle class, which believed it was being squeezed as the poor rose from misery but their own road to the upper class was not clear.

In the economic downturn of the mid-2010s, many saw their living conditions

actually deteriorate. The share of Brazilians living on less than US \$1.9 per day increased from 4.5 percent in 2014⁷³ to a record high of 6.5 percent in 2018, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics.⁷⁴

Likewise, despite the Philippines being one the fastest-growing economies in Asia,⁷⁵ average Filipinos face shabby living standards, widespread corruption, and bureaucratic red tape. The country consistently ranks poorly among nations in terms of starting businesses, acquiring credit and enforcing contracts, according to the World Bank Doing Business report.⁷⁶ The failure of political elites to provide quality social services, safer streets, or to meet the demands of those lifted out of poverty led many to begin doubting the efficiency of the political system as a whole, and to consider trying something different, Heydarian notes.⁷⁷

DEALIGNMENT

The fourth element that has opened the doors of Western democracies to national populists is the weakening of bonds between the electorate and traditional parties. The notion of dealignment, however, does not follow suit in the Brazilian and Filipino cases.

In contrast to the bipartisan model of the United States, or fairly defined political groups in Western Europe (such as conservatives, greens and social democrats), Brazil has 33 existing political parties, with 77 others in the process of being formed.⁷⁸ Bolsonaro himself has been a member of eight political parties and has recently proposed a new one.⁷⁹

The Philippines plays host to countless political parties, party-lists, and turncoat politicians⁸⁰ whenever elections draw near. Duterte has switched political colors when it benefited him, abandoning his predecessor's party for a coalition composed of cronies and traditional politicians.⁸¹ His new party's name (Hugpong ng Pagbabago) crudely translates as "Coalition for Change," signaling a supposed divergence from so-called dirty politics that often characterize the country's elections.⁸² This move is nothing new for Filipinos, since this electioneering has been around since the country gained independence from Spanish rule 121 years

ago.⁸³ Coalitions between political parties are common in election season but either dissolve or become fixtures in the political landscape.⁸⁴

"In the Philippines and also in Brazil, you don't have party politics, like Democrats versus Republicans," Heydarian said. "There are times when a new leader comes in, with fresh ideas—even pos-

labels this facet of populist movements in the Global South as "penal populism,"⁸⁵ a topic he addresses alongside the role of human rights in the age of strongmen in a book edited by Harvard Law School's Gerald Neuman.

Duterte's election has been described as the end of post-Marcos Philippine politics—a period marked by liberal



Seized firearms on display during a visit by Duterte at the Police Regional Office in General Santos City on September 23, 2016. Credit: Simeon Celi/Wikimedia Commons.

sibly deadly [ideas]—and a majority of society is willing to give them a chance and say, 'Well, the problems are so complicated that his guy may need two, three years of *carte blanche* and then let's see if what he did was right or wrong.'

"Bolsonaro, very similarly to Duterte," he added, "kind of sees violence as a cathartic solution."

SHOOT TO KILL

In both societies, polarizing rhetoric, amplified by social media echo chambers, led to further divisions. It also paved the way for the political leaders to introduce unorthodox policies in the absence of strong checks and balances. Police violence has escalated in Brazil while Duterte's bloody inquisition to curb the illegal drug trade has killed thousands of Filipinos, mostly urban poor. Heydarian

reforms prioritizing civil liberties and good governance.⁸⁶ "Dutertismo,"⁸⁷ as the president's leadership style and socioeconomic policies are known, runs in the opposite direction.⁸⁸ His drug war is a critical example. In many speeches, Duterte labeled the illegal drug trade the source of the Philippines' problems. His crackdown employed the "Tokhang"⁸⁹ method, a portmanteau of the Filipino words for "knock" and "plead." Police would go around villages and urban-poor communities, knocking on households and asking suspected users and pushers to turn themselves in, leading to arrests, surrenders, and village watch-lists.⁹⁰

Widespread killings resulted, horrifying Filipinos as news reports described corpses littering the roadside, but rationalized the violence because the victims were drug addicts. Police killed suspect-

ed drug dealers and users in firefights, later claiming they had to fight back despite reports that many suspects did not own, and couldn't afford, guns, as well as allegations of crime scene tampering.⁹¹ Far more were killed in extrajudicial killings—a term that became common in the Philippines—committed by masked vigilantes on motorcycles who left mutilated bodies behind in the streets.⁹²

The initial death toll—nearly 1,800 in the first seven weeks⁹³—prompted global headlines and international condemnation. Human rights groups have since tallied the number of extrajudicial killings between 20,000 and 29,000 lives since 2016.⁹⁴ Official government numbers are far lower, at around 5,000, according to the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency.⁹⁵

In the Philippines, where institutions are vulnerable, the country could be flirting with a transition to an even more authoritarian dictatorship.

Ironically, for a politician who professes to be vehemently against drug addiction, Duterte has admitted to using fentanyl⁹⁶ for pain management and marijuana⁹⁷ to stay awake. Less surprising is that the drug war's brutality morphed into a campaign against the country's urban poor. The controversial shoot-to-kill policy that millions of Filipinos voted for resulted in scores of their neighbors being gunned down, as most of the dead are users, street dealers, and middlemen, not the bigwigs directing illegal operations.

Stronger institutions than those in the Philippines may have prevented Brazil from going down a similar path, for now. Although violence is endemic and heavily-armed drug dealers control large slums in the country's cities, Brazilian gun laws are far stricter than those in the U.S. For a citizen to buy and have a gun at home, an authorization from the Federal Police is mandatory. Prospective gun owners must be over 25, have no criminal record and demonstrate technical and psychological conditions to use a firearm. Such a license needs to be renewed every three years.⁹⁸

Bolsonaro campaigned on a platform

of relaxing such rules⁹⁹ and also reducing police liability for civilian deaths, presenting both ideas as solutions to Brazil's widespread public security issues.¹⁰⁰ In 2015, he declared that "armed citizens are a country's first line of defense."¹⁰¹

His words turned into action in May 2019, when he extended¹⁰² the right to bear arms to members of 20 different professions, including politicians, truck drivers, lawyers, farmers while on their properties, and journalists covering the police beat. Bolsonaro withdrew that decree¹⁰³ after pushback from Congress¹⁰⁴ and the Supreme Court, but shortly issued three new decrees that loosened the requirements for civilians to buy guns and keep them at home.¹⁰⁵

Bolsonaro has resorted to social media to incite his supporters to press legisla-

tors on the matter.¹⁰⁶ In December 2019 he wrote that firearms registrations had increased by 50 percent while the number of deaths fell 22 percent, mocking "experts'" warnings that the opposite would happen.¹⁰⁷ At the time, the most recent data compiled by G1's Violence Monitor in partnership with the Brazilian Forum of Public Safety and the University of São Paulo's Center for the Study of Violence indicated a 22 percent yearly reduction in violent deaths from January to September 2019.¹⁰⁸

What Bolsonaro did not mention was that police killings are on the rise.¹⁰⁹ The most recent data shows that police officers committed more than 10 percent of Brazil's total homicides recorded in the last year.¹¹⁰ In 2018, young Black boys and men overwhelmingly represented the victims of police brutality in Brazil.¹¹¹

SHADES OF POPULISM

Although Bolsonaro and Duterte bear many similarities, there are also stark differences in their policies, especially when it comes to social issues.

The Brazilian president campaigned on a conservative social agenda. Backed by Christian evangelicals, who have

built a strong caucus in the Brazilian Congress over the past two decades,¹¹² Bolsonaro pledged to defend "traditional family values,"¹¹³ fight so-called "gender ideology,"¹¹⁴ and put an end to alleged left-wing indoctrination at the country's schools.¹¹⁵ He has pledged, for instance, to root out the influence of Brazil's most famous educator, Paulo Freire.¹¹⁶

Brazil's Minister of Foreign Affairs, among the most ideological hard-liners in Bolsonaro's cabinet, has claimed global warming is a Marxist plot,¹¹⁷ labeled Nazism a left-wing movement,¹¹⁸ and "denounced the United Nations and other so-called globalist forces for attempting to supplant true nationalism."¹¹⁹

Bolsonaro has similarly challenged scientific data about the Amazon fires¹²⁰ and, without any evidence, claimed that NGOs¹²¹ and Hollywood actor Leonardo DiCaprio¹²² were responsible for destroying the rainforest.

In comparison, in the Philippines, Duterte has sometimes embraced progressive positions on LGBTQ rights, but has flip-flopped over the years.¹²³ At the start of his term, he appointed members of the Left¹²⁴ to head the departments of social welfare, agrarian reform, and the anti-poverty commission. Months later, Duterte's allies in Congress rejected the appointments,¹²⁵ but continued the government's cash handouts to the neediest.¹²⁶ Unlike his Brazilian counterpart, Duterte believes that more action¹²⁷ is warranted against climate change since developing countries bear the brunt of the devastation.

Additionally, Duterte enjoys popular support. His approval ratings have soared between 70-85 percent in his first three years.¹²⁸ Despite his veneer of progressivism on a limited range of issues, he has also shown that he is anti-abortion,¹²⁹ supports the return of the death penalty for drug-related crimes,¹³⁰ embraces crony capitalism,¹³¹ and is deeply misogynistic.¹³² For Aguirre and Casiple, Duterte is neither Right nor Left, but rather "the product of the emergence of new conditions," as Aguirre explains. "We produced him; the frustrations of the people made him."¹³³

This stands in sharp contrast to Bra-

zil, where Bolsonaro's approval rating dropped to 29 percent in December 2019,¹³⁴ down from 35 percent in April.¹³⁵ His disapproval rate increased from 27 percent to 38 percent over the same period.

Even after he leaves the presidential Palácio do Planalto, Bolsonaro's populist agenda will remain ingrained in the country's political fabric, potentially threatening long-term prospects for democracy.

In mid-March 2020, Brazilians quarantined amid the COVID-19 crisis banged pots from windows and balconies on several consecutive nights to protest Bolsonaro's downplaying the pandemic risks and his refusal to implement social distancing measures nationwide.¹³⁶ In the Philippines, citizens took to social media to condemn preferential COVID-19 testing for the political elite, the lack of mass testing for the public, and the messy logistics of Duterte's lockdown of the country's most populous island.¹³⁷

BEYOND 2022

The most obvious reaction to the increasingly challenging scenario Bolsonaro is likely to face, as rifts with Congress multiply and the economy underperforms, came in early March 2020. Bolsonaro claimed to have evidence of fraud in the 2018 election and that he should have been elected in the first round vote.¹³⁸ Again playing to public distrust of institutions, he challenged journalists to find "one Brazilian who trusts the electoral system."¹³⁹ He has not revealed proof of his claims since.

Political analysts warned that such an alarming statement indicates that by questioning the legitimacy of the voting system, Bolsonaro is preemptively seeding doubts about the next election,¹⁴⁰ in 2022, which suggests he might not willingly relinquish power if he is not reelected.

Duterte is not eligible for reelection after his six-year term ends in 2022. But the risk that he might also flout the rules concerns Heydarian. "In countries like the Philippines, Turkey, India, or Indonesia, once you have an authoritarian

populist in power, as long as the military is not against them, they'll have an easy time railroading their way to consolidations of power," he said.¹⁴¹ In the Philippines, where institutions are vulnerable, the country could be flirting with a transition to an even more authoritarian dictatorship.

Democratic rupture¹⁴² is one of the most serious potential consequences of populist movements in the Global South.

However, even if both leaders honor the law, and allow for a peaceful transition of power, their policies will have long-lasting effects on Brazilian and Filipino societies.

The same base that elected Duterte has since brought Philippine politics to its knees by wiping out opposition candidates for the senate and congress.¹⁴³ The supermajority¹⁴⁴ Duterte's party now commands means that even after his term ends, his vice grip on the legislative branch and judiciary may remain in place.

The normalization of polarizing rhetoric has not only affected public discourse but has contaminated local politics in Brazil. State governors of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo elected in 2018 joined Bolsonaro's radical law-and-order platform, although they are not political allies¹⁴⁵ and have plans to run for the presidency in the next election themselves.¹⁴⁶ Right-wing social conservative candidates from police, military, and religious¹⁴⁷ backgrounds also won seats in state¹⁴⁸ and federal legislative houses.¹⁴⁹ That suggests that even after he leaves the presidential Palácio do Planalto, Bolsonaro's populist agenda will remain ingrained in the country's political fabric, potentially threatening long-term prospects for democracy.

Support for democratic ideals fell during Bolsonaro's first year in office. The share of Brazilians who agreed that democracy is the best form of government declined from 69 percent in 2018 to 62 percent in 2019, while 22 percent said they are indifferent to whether the government remains democratic or becomes

a dictatorship, up from 13 percent a year before.¹⁵⁰

In a broader sense, when emerging market countries leap to right-wing populism backed by social conservative forces, they also help reshape the international community. Brazilian delegations to the UN have campaigned to veto the use of the word "gender" in multiple resolutions,¹⁵¹ shocking Western countries but joining the likes of Russia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Bahrain.

Brazil also joined the U.S., Poland, and Lebanon at the 2nd International Conference on Christian Persecution,¹⁵² hosted by Viktor Orbán in Budapest in November 2019, marking a stark shift¹⁵³ from the country's foreign policy¹⁵⁴ tradition of multilateralism.¹⁵⁵ And Bolsonaro's son Eduardo, who chairs the Brazilian Senate's Commission on Foreign Affairs and National Defense, has been named the South American ambassador for Steve Bannon's far-right group The Movement.¹⁵⁶

Operating similarly as populist leaders of the Global North and adapting the populist playbook for their local contexts, Bolsonaro and Duterte have shown that radical policies are enactable, attacks on institutions can be normalized, and democracy enjoys no guarantees of protection. Given that similar trends may affect the other countries in the Global South, recognizing developing world populism has become a vital piece of understanding the populist Right's global expansion.

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Nothing Is Untouched

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