

THE RADICAL RIGHT DURING CRISIS

Eviane Leidig (ed.)



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Preface

To say that 2020 was a memorable year would be an understatement. While the COVID-19 pandemic overshadowed all else and would quickly have a lasting impact on our daily lives, other events related to the radical right soon surfaced.

The year started off with tragedy as a shooter in Hanau, Germany opened fire targeting Turkish “immigrants” (although in reality German citizens). Driven by racist and misogynist conspiracy theories, the terrorist uploaded a manifesto and YouTube video shortly before carrying out the attack. Only a few days later, riots broke out in New Delhi, India, as Hindu nationalist mobs descended onto Muslim neighbourhoods in brazen acts of violence that left dozens dead and hundreds injured. The riots were incited by far right politicians who equated protesters—of a newly passed bill that discriminates citizenship based on religion—as anti-national and worthy targets of murder.

Soon after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic in March, we witnessed radical right leaders enact sweeping authoritarian powers, weaponizing upon societal instability to bolster their agendas. Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz party in Hungary passed legislation that would allow the prime minister to rule by decree indefinitely, thus further contributing to erosion of democracy. Meanwhile, Russia’s constitutional referendum outcome secured Vladimir Putin power in office until 2036. Other radical right world leaders who later tested positive for COVID-19, such as Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro, continued to promote falsehoods steeped in anti-science and anti-expert claims. Fear of democratic backsliding became entrenched as panic surrounding the coronavirus spiked across the world.

While anti-mask protests gained strongholds in North America and Europe, another social movement started taking to the streets. The gruesome murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota mobilized a summer of Black Lives Matter protests in the U.S. and those in international solidarity. Championing the call for police reform, however, soon faced backlash from far right counter-protestors. Militia groups such as the self-described Boogaloo Bois, and male supremacist organizations like the Proud Boys, began roaming the streets intimidating BLM protestors, at times with direct violence. Coupled with mounting unemployment levels and economic hardship as a consequence of the pandemic, and social

media disinformation circulating at unprecedented rates, 2020 witnessed the height of political polarization.

Meanwhile, the Canadian government charged a young man with the first ever designated case of an “incel” attack. Although terrorist attacks have been carried out by self-described incels in the past, the recognition of this hateful, violent misogynistic ideology as a motivation for murder added weight to an increasing area of national security concern. Growing incel online communities is not the only digital network with deadly off-line effects that rose to prominence last year. Soon enough, QAnon began appearing in media headlines. This conspiracy theory, which dates back to 2017 on the imageboard 4chan, advocates that a secret cabal of Satan-worshipping cannibalistic pedophiles, most of whom are prominent politicians from the Democratic Party, are running a global child sex-trafficking ring. This group of elites are supposedly plotting against Donald Trump, who is heroically defending against their pursuits. Information concerning new developments are released in small increments by an anonymous user who goes by the name “Q”, a person claiming to have high-level security clearance in the American government with access to classified information.

The rise in popularity of QAnon adherents coalesced with their increasing visibility at Trump rallies and rapid sharing of disinformation on social media in the buildup to the U.S. presidential election. Although American in origin, the QAnon movement spread to other countries, including the UK, France, Germany, and Japan. Combined with false narratives concerning the development and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine and a summer of social unrest, many feared impending violence in the run-up to election day. Such violence was delayed, however, until the beginning of 2021 when a mob stormed the U.S. Capitol following incitement to violence by the president. After months of claiming election fraud and failure to concede to Democratic challenger Joe Biden, Trump galvanized this group of insurrectionists in a final display before leaving office.

In spite of these worrying developments, particularly concerning the role of far right actors, 2020 was a year that also witnessed positive events. A nationwide law that would prohibit abortion in Poland was delayed implementation after large scale protests, delivering a major blow to the ruling right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) party and narrowly re-elected President Andrzej Duda. The end of the year also saw activists celebrating Argentina’s passage of legalizing abortion, a massive step that may influence a domino effect in the region. Both of these advances gives hope towards expanding women’s reproductive rights in the future.

In Greece, the trial of the openly neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn with the court ruling its role as a criminal organization, was met with widespread jubilation. Although this does not signal the end of the far right in Greece, the verdict provides much needed vindication to victims and their families. It further sends a pivotal message concerning the importance of justice in upholding the rule of law. Meanwhile, Belarusians protested for free and fair elections in the face of authoritarianism. Although ongoing, the demand for democracy in Belarus remains strong. And despite acts of state-sponsored violence, a youth-led movement in Nigeria against police brutality and human rights abuses has been likened to once-in-a-generation change.

Finally, a Biden-Harris administration achieved through the peaceful transfer of power signals a benchmark of liberal democracy. The administration has already dedicated efforts towards reviewing and assessing domestic violent extremism as a serious threat to public safety. While some criticism can, and should, be levied against this approach, it is a welcome step in the right direction towards countering the far right.

This Yearbook features contributions by academic, practitioner, and policy Fellows at the Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right (CARR), providing a holistic overview of radical right activity in 2020 in relation to global events. CARR was established in 2018 and is chaired by a group of researchers: Professor Matthew Feldman, Dr William Allchorn, Professor Cynthia Miller-Idriss, Dr Archie Henderson, Professor Tamir Bar-On, Dr Eviane Leidig, Bàrbara Molas, and Augusta Dell’Omo. Special thanks to Pragya Rai and James Hardy for their assistance in compiling this Yearbook

The following entries comprise only a small amount of the hundreds of blog posts written by our Fellows as part of the CARR Insight Blog (radicalrightanalysis.com). The increased visibility and readership of these blog posts are in great part due to CARR’s media partners where several of these posts were first published by *openDemocracy*, *Fair Observer*, and *Rant Media*. An additional thanks goes to Walid Hourri, Anna Pivovarchuk, and Ahmed Baba, for their editorial cooperation and dedication.

The Yearbook begins by returning to a recurrent theme—exploring how studies of authoritarianism and fascism can offer insight into explaining developments today—before turning to radical right nationalist imaginaries and memory reconstruction. It then switches to an empirical focus, analysing terrorist events in 2020 not only enacted by the perpetrator and

their broader ecosystems of radicalization, but also detailing those harmed in the process and offering counter-terrorism recommendations.

Of course, it would be remiss to avoid reflections of radical right responses during the pandemic, discussed extensively in the following section of the Yearbook. Succeeding this are important assessments of the relationship between the radical right and Black Lives Matter, policing, and military presence. Technology has been especially crucial in radical right communication, recruitment, radicalization, and mobilization in these contexts, which is examined in the next section.

The Yearbook then situates the ideological and intellectual undercurrents of the radical right, often targeting left-wing academia and scientific experts. Added to this list of “enemies” is an effort towards controlling sexuality, reproduction, and gender norms, which is explored by several authors.

Penultimately, the Yearbook compares both the strengths and weaknesses of the radical right in 2020 with respect to political parties. New voter strongholds are identified, as well as areas of decline in radical right support and acceptance. Lastly, it concludes by exploring a wide array of approaches to countering the radical right, including much needed online and offline solutions.

This comprehensive and timely edited volume maps the radical right in 2020 with the aim of disseminating essential knowledge of this phenomenon to a broad audience of scholars, educators, practitioners, policymakers, security services, journalists, and the general public. We hope that the analysis provided by these leading experts will aid towards a more nuanced understanding of the radical right and effective counter responses in challenging this threat to democracy.

Dr Eviane Leidig
Oslo, Norway
January 2021

Authoritarianism Revisited

The Psychology of a Fascist Leader: Hitler's "Blond Beast" Reinhard Heydrich

Chris Webb

Reinhardt Heydrich was born in Halle, Germany, a provincial town in Prussian Saxony, on 7 March 1904. He was the son of a Dresden music teacher who had founded the First Halle Conservatory for Music, Theatre and Teaching. Heydrich joined the Freikorps in 1919 and was strongly influenced in his early years by the racial fanaticism of *Völkisch* circles. On 30 March 1922, he entered the *Reichsmarine* in Kiel, serving for a time under Wilhelm Canaris, who nurtured his taste for naval intelligence work. In 1931, Heydrich was forced to resign from the navy by Admiral Raeder for 'conduct unbecoming to an officer and a gentleman', after compromising the virtue of a shipyard director's daughter.¹

In July 1931, he joined the Nazi Party and then the *Schutzstaffel* (SS), attracting the attention of Heinrich Himmler and he rose rapidly through the ranks. He was appointed SS-*Sturmbannführer* on 25 December 1931, then SS-*Standartenführer* and Chief of the SD (Security Service) in July 1932. Heydrich was promoted to SS-*Brigadeführer* on 21 March 1933 and, in reward for his murderous services during the Ernst Rohm Purge (later dubbed "The Night of the Long Knives"), he became an SS-*Obergruppenführer* on 1 July 1934. Around the time he became a SS-*Sturmbannführer*, he dropped the "t" from his Christian name, and henceforth was known as Reinhard. Heydrich was tall, slim, blond-haired, with slanting, deep-set blue eyes. He possessed a military bearing and ice-cool hardness, which seemed to epitomise the "Nordic-Aryan type" of Nazi mythology. His athleticism—he was a first-class fencer, an excellent horseman and a skilled pilot—allied to his talent as a violinist and his orderly, disciplined exterior impressed Himmler, who selected him as his right-hand man.

As Himmler's assistant in securing control of the Munich and then Bavarian police after the Nazis seizure of power, Heydrich assured the successful co-ordination of the political police in the other German Lands during 1933-34. Heydrich soon negotiated his way to becoming Chief of the Berlin Gestapo and by 1936 was given command of the security police throughout the Reich. An able technician of power, ruthless,

1 Robert S. Wistrich, *Who's Who in Nazi Germany* (London: Routledge, 1995).

cold and calculating, without any compunction in carrying out the most inhuman measures, Heydrich made himself indispensable to the masters of the Third Reich. Yet the arrogant facade disguised a deeply split personality, a neurotic temperament and pathological self-hatred which found its outlet in a boundless greed for power, morbid suspiciousness and exhibitionism. A sense of “racial” inadequacy, the gnawing uncertainty caused by his suspected half-Jewish origins—utilised for blackmail purposes by his rivals for power, though never established as a fact. All this added to his built-in sense of inferiority.

As head of the *Sicherheitspolizei* (SiPo), the unified, centralised, militarised and Nazified security police, Heydrich reacted with pitiless harshness in dealing with so-called “enemies of the State”. His cynicism and contempt for human beings led him to exploit the basest instincts—sadism, envy, intolerance—in weaving his gigantic spider’s web of police surveillance in the Third Reich. He filed extensive dossiers not only on enemies of the Party, but also on his rivals and colleagues, using the police apparatus to set his opponents at each other’s throats. Scientific studies of the modus operandi of potential enemies of the State, like Marxists, Jews, Freemasons, Liberal Republicans, religious and cultural groups, went hand-in-hand with arrests, torture and murder of those who stood in the way of the totalitarian police apparatus.

The “Blond Beast” who controlled the sole intelligence service of the Party after 1935, specialised in devious methods of blackmail alongside the weapons of open terror and persecution. Heydrich’s hand was most probably in the Tukhachevsky Affair, which led to the purge of the top Red Army generals in the Soviet Union. He also fabricated the scandalous intrigue among his peers, which brought down the leading German generals, including Werner von Blomberg and Werner von Fritsch in 1938. His proclivity for “dirty tricks” was again in evidence when he masterminded the fake attack on the Gleiwitz radio transmitter station, which provided Hitler’s excuse for invading Poland on 1 September 1939. In the same year, Heydrich was appointed head of the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA) which incorporated the Gestapo, the criminal police and the *Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers-SS* (or SD). A gigantic political machine for centralising and transmitting information to all corners of the Third Reich, which gave Heydrich the opportunity to perfect the techniques of secret police power.

The most satanic consequence of this accumulation of power was revealed in Heydrich’s implementation of the order for the wholesale

extermination of European Jewry. Already before the war, Heydrich had concentrated the management of Jewish affairs in his hands, though in 1938 the emphasis was still on a policy of forced emigration. One of the instigators of the *Krystal Nacht* (Crystal Night) pogrom of November 1938, Heydrich had sent Adolf Eichmann to Vienna to organise a “Centre for Jewish Emigration” and, impressed by his success, had created a similar centre in Berlin.

After the conquest of Poland, Heydrich ordered the concentration of Polish Jews in ghetto’s and the appointment of Jewish councils, using a characteristically perfidious tactic of forcing the Jewish communities to “collaborate” in their own destruction. With Eichmann’s help, he organised the mass deportations of Jews from annexed parts of Poland, Germany and Austria to the territory of the General-Gouvernement. In his directive of 21 September 1939, Heydrich distinguished, however, between the “final aim”, requiring longer periods of time and the stages required or achieving it. On 31 July 1941, following the invasion of the Soviet Union, in the first six weeks of the campaign Heydrich had, with typical bravado, flown with the Luftwaffe, Goering commissioned Heydrich to carry out a ‘total solution of the Jewish question in those territories of Europe which are under German influence’. Both the terms *Gesamtlosung* (Total Solution) and *Endlosung* (Final Solution) were used in the document to Heydrich and he was delegated to take responsibility for all the necessary organisational, administrative and financial measures to achieve that terrible, murderous end. His *Einsatzgruppen*, which had already killed tens of thousands of Poles and Jews with the co-operation of the German Army, were to murder hundreds of thousands of Russian and Polish Jews as well as Soviet officials.

To co-ordinate the action of various government and Party agencies, Heydrich convened the Wannsee Conference in a Berlin suburb on 20 January 1942 to discuss the ways and means of implementing the “Final Solution of the European Jewish Question”. In the circumlocutory language used to disguise the policy of mass murder, which he had a considerable part in devising, Heydrich described how Jews capable of work ‘are brought to these areas in the eastern occupied territories and employed in road building, in which task undoubtedly a large part will fall out through natural diminution’. In other words, they would be sent to their death through hunger, exhaustion or disease and, where required, by murder squads. The surviving remnant would be given appropriate “treatment” as they represented a “natural selection,” constituting the “germ-cell” of a new Jewish development should they be allowed to go free. Having laid

the groundwork for the “Final Solution”, Heydrich left his Berlin headquarters to assume the post of Deputy Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia on 23 September 1941. Taking up residence in Prague, Heydrich adopted “the policy of the whip and the sugar”, speeding up repression and ordering mass executions while attempting to win over the workers and peasants by improving social conditions. Overestimating his success in “pacifying” the Czechs, Heydrich abandoned normal security precautions and drove about in an open car without armed escort.

On 27 May 1942, he was gravely wounded by two Free Czech agents, Josef Gabčík and Jan Kubis, who were trained in England and parachuted into Czechoslovakia, who opened fire on his car and when one of their guns jammed threw a grenade into the vehicle. The assassins were discovered, along with other members of the Resistance group, sheltering in the St. Cyril and Methodius church in Prague. On 18 June 1942, after a pitched battle with scores of SS troops, Josef Gabčík killed himself in the crypt, while Jan Kubis was fatally wounded and later died in hospital.

On 4 June 1942, Heydrich died at 4:30AM from blood poisoning and four days after his death, about 1,000 Jews left Prague in a single train, which was designated “AaH” (*Attentat auf Heydrich*, or Assassination of Heydrich) in “honour” of Heydrich’s death. This transport was officially destined for Ujazdów in the Lublin district, Poland, but was gassed at the Bełżec death camp. The members of Odilo Globocnik’s resettlement staff henceforward dedicated the murder programme to Heydrich’s memory under the code name “Einsatz Reinhardt”.²

Heydrich’s body was transported from Prague by special train to Berlin and his funeral on 9 June 1942 was the grandest of any funeral ceremony conducted during the history of the Third Reich, held in the Mosaic Hall of the Reich’s Chancellery on Vos-Strasse. Following the funeral oration delivered by Hitler, the coffin was transported through the streets of Berlin on a gun carriage towed by a half-track to a simple grave in Invaliden cemetery. As Heydrich was being buried Hitler ordered the complete destruction of the little Bohemian village of Lidice as retaliation for the assassination of Heydrich on 9 June 1942, under the command of SS-*Hauptsturmführer* Max Rostock.

This was originally published on the Holocaust History Society website.

Chris Webb is a Senior Fellow at CARR and founder of the Holocaust Historical Society.

2 Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell & Co., 1968).

Hegel and Fascism

Henry Mead

In his 1945 work *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Karl Popper famously attacked what he saw as the intellectual roots of fascism. Tracing a lineage from Plato to its modern progenitors, he asserted that ‘Hegel’s hysterical historicism was the fertiliser from which totalitarianism was grown’.¹ Popper’s chapter on “Hegel and the New Tribalism” includes a long list of charges, questioning Hegel’s motives as an employee of the Prussian State, his style and knowing use of ‘imbecile fancies’, and his contributions to what Popper termed “historicism”, nationalism, and finally to modern totalitarianism.

Popper, historicism and Hegel’s critics

For Popper, the term “historicism” referred to the notion of a fixed path running through history, a pattern predetermined that would progress inexorably to a *telos*. In his view, Hegel had inherited the Platonic fixation on forms via the immanent essentialism of Aristotle. In his phenomenology, his elision of subject and object, and contraries of all sorts, involved a dangerous absolution of all moral or epistemological distinction. According to Popper, the theodicy presented in Hegel’s philosophy of history was ruthless in its optimism, relegating suffering and moral evil to necessary way-stations on a path towards the absolute.

In Popper’s account, Hegel’s “historicism” combines the Aristotelean notion of entelechy with the German Romantic nationalism of Herder and Fichte; one of its results, in a later generation, was fascism. In this view, the myth of the nation was justification of the emergent state, an embodiment of the absolute that naturally requires enemies and warfare in its formation. Aggressive actions were exempt, in their providential status, from moral censure. Such processes, moreover, were precipitated by certain Great Men, also above morality in their unknowing enactment of historical will, and worthy of celebration for their heroic life and exploits. Popper sceptically recounts Hegel’s plan of history culminating, following periods of Oriental despotism and Classical democracy, in the “German

1 Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol II. *The High Tide of Prophecy, Hegel, Marx, and the Aftermath* (London: Routledge, 1945), 270.

Age". With the Reformation at the threshold, modernity finds its apogee in Prussian statism. As Bertrand Russell wrote, also in 1945, 'It is odd that a process which is represented as cosmic should all have taken place on our planet, and most of it near the Mediterranean'.² Popper was, however, less ironic than condemnatory: in Popper's opinion, Hegel's idea of the state as the manifestation of the Absolute spirit subordinated individuals within civil society to its will and authority. All these aspects seemed to Popper to lay the foundations of modern totalitarianism.

Such an attack by the Austrian-born Popper had a great influence in the English-speaking world, consolidated by similar commentaries by Russell and Isaiah Berlin; for many in Britain and America, Hegel's reputation after World War II was at its lowest ebb.³ It is worth noting, however, that attacks on Hegel on ideological grounds began well before this nadir—as Kirk Willis has shown, foreboding commentaries regarding the geopolitical outcomes of Hegel's thought are traceable back into the 19th century. As early as 1838, the *British and Foreign Review* described Prussian ministers as being 'filled with Hegelian casuistry'; comments in the intellectual press on Hegel's conservatism continued through the 1840s and 50s.⁴ Bismarck's expansionist policies cemented this wariness: a piece in the *Contemporary Review* of 1899, for example, noted that Bismarck merely 'carried out the general ideas of one of the greatest philosophers of the counter-Revolution—Hegel'.⁵

Intimations of militarism came to a head during the Great War: by 1915, the reaction in Britain led to the forced resignation of the Lord Chancellor, Richard Burdon Haldane, an Idealist philosopher, owing to suspicions over his "Germanophilia".⁶ Baron von Hugel's *The German Soul* (1916) linked Hegelianism with the 'barbarous excesses of the German mentality now at work',⁷ as did John Dewey, in *German Philosophy and Politics* (1916). George Santayana went further in *Egotism in German Philosophy* (1915), which blamed the "egoism" of German thought from Kant onwards for German aggression: 'a spirit of uncompromising self-assertion and metaphysical conceit which the German nation is now reducing

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- 2 Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (London: George Allen, 1946), 735.
 - 3 See Isaiah Berlin, "Historical Inevitability," (1953), in *Liberty, the Collected Essays of Isaiah Berlin*, ed. H. Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
 - 4 Kirk Willis, "The Introduction and Critical Reception of Hegelian Thought in Britain 1830-1900", *Victorian Studies* 32 no. 1 (1988): 87-111, 103-4.
 - 5 Willis, "Introduction," 104.
 - 6 Andrew Vincent, "German Philosophy and British Public Policy: Richard Burdon Haldane in Theory and Practice", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68 no. 1 (2007): 157-179.
 - 7 Willis, "Introduction", 8.

to action'.⁸ In 1917, Leonard Hobhouse identified Hegel's 'metaphysical theory of the state' for state militarism as a direct cause of the Great War.⁹

Neo-Hegelianism and its fascist influence

The history of fascism begins in the same period. While the philosophical pre-history of Nazism owes much to the German intellectual context, there is no doubt that Hegelianism also contributed to the first, non-German forms of Fascism, perhaps most conspicuously in the adaptation of Idealism in Italy, notably by Giovanni Gentile. Gentile managed to connect Hegel to Mussolini's project within a new system he named "actualism". By emphasising the corporative element in *Hegel's Philosophy of the Right* (1821), Gentile could provide a rationale for Mussolini's state and leadership. As recounted by A. James Gregor, 'Gentile's Actualism gave every appearance of being capable of providing a synthesizing philosophical rationale for emerging Fascism'. By 1918, Gentile could foresee:

a revolutionary "new state" that would be the expression of the "fully rational and concrete" national will of Italians in their collectivity. In that "revolutionary state," politics and morality, parochial and national interests, would combine in such a fashion that individuals would fully identify themselves with its actions. That new state would be a spiritual reality in which all would find their place.¹⁰

There was then a neo-Hegelian lineage leading into the new ideological category of "Fascism"; not just for Gentile, but for various intellectuals of Mussolini's Italy, adaptations of Hegel provided a logic for the reconciliation of the individual, the industrial communities, and the state under Fascist rule. As Gregor goes on, 'the community—as the state—that served as the grounds of individuation for the individual was not a construction that was *inter homines*, between members of the community, but an immanent reality that arose out of members themselves. It was *interiore homine*... The community was understood to be at the core of the individual'.¹¹ Italian fascism thus provided a practicable model for a totalitarian regime based on a Hegelian tradition as the Nazi movement reached its maturity in the 1930s.

8 Willis, "Introduction", 7.

9 Leonard Hobhouse, *The Metaphysical Theory of the State* (London: George Allen, 1918).

10 A. James Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals: Fascist Social and Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 86.

11 Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, 114.

And yet between his death and the present day, with a notable peak among the British Idealists the late 19th century, Hegel's works have been cited frequently by progressive thinkers in Britain and across Europe.¹² Benedetto Croce, who developed his neo-Hegelianism in collaboration with Gentile, rejected his friend's fascist ideology in the 1920s. Then, of course, there was the burgeoning Marxist movement, in which Hegel's legacy took a radically different form.

The Germanophobic reaction to Idealism were clearly of its time: the French generation that attended Alexandre Kojève's lectures on Hegel in the 1930s led the shift to a new existential reading; and Walter Kaufmann's comprehensive defence of Hegel against Popper's charges in *The Hegel Myth and its Method* (1959) marked the changing tide of opinion.¹³ In Britain, Charles Taylor, Berlin's student, presented a major study that would shape post-war readings of Hegel and dispel the cruder charges of earlier writers; and by 1989 Francis Fukuyama had made Kojève's account the basis of his pronouncement of a post-Cold War "End of History". Despite these developments, necessarily foreshortened here, the earlier suspicions of Anglophone readers remain noteworthy. The tensions and overlaps between forms of liberal, socialist, and fascist teleology are clear in the legacy of Hegelianism up to the present day.

Dr Henry Mead is a Senior Fellow at CARR and research fellow at the University of Tallinn. Research for this chapter was supported by a European Research Council Starting Grant (TAU17149) "Between the Times: Embattled Temporalities and Political Imagination in Interwar Europe".

12 See Lisa Herzog, ed., *Hegel's Thought in Europe: Currents, Crosscurrents and Undercurrents* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

13 Walter Kaufmann, *From Shakespeare to Existentialism: Studies in Poetry, Religion, and Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), 88-119.

The ‘Silent Majority’: Populist Cliché or Warning?

Aristotle Kallis

In the run-up to the EU referendum in Britain in June 2016, at a time when the Remain vote was apparently enjoying a modest but clear advantage, one of the numerous opinion polls focused on public attitudes to immigration and on how this might affect the popular vote.¹ When asked to assess immigrants’ contribution to British economy, responses were split evenly between those acknowledging immigrants’ contribution to the economy and those questioning it. Yet very strong affirmative majorities were recorded by the same poll in response to questions about Britain being “overcrowded”, about the need to “significantly” restrict immigration through tighter border controls, to limit migrants’ access to public services, and so on. When interviewees were asked to identify the one issue that could sway their vote in the referendum, respondents singled out immigration by a spectacular margin. Unfortunately, we know too well how this played out.

As the history of opinion polling shows, such social majorities can however be mercurial and hard to gauge. Societies typically host a wide spectrum of views on any given issue and, while it may be relatively easier to talk of “extremes”, the mainstream-as-majority view is often very hard to ascertain or deduce.² Opinion polls go some way towards capturing the mood of society in a more focused, issue-specific format but they can also be misleading: their results hinge on the way the question is framed, the moment when or the medium through which it is asked, and the group that is sampled. Such parameters may all skew the findings,³ in some cases deliberately or as in most cases unintentionally. Thus, to talk of “social majorities”—or the general will of a population—is very often a wishful projection or an educated guess with a very limited shelf life indeed.

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- 1 “Recent Polls on Immigration, Public Opinion & Voting: MW 361”, Migration Watch UK, last modified April 7, 2016, <https://www.migrationwatchuk.org/briefing-paper/361/recent-polls-on-immigration>
 - 2 Aristotle Kallis, “When Fascism Became Mainstream: The Challenge of Extremism in Times of Crisis”, *Fascism* 4 no. 1 (2015): 1–24.
 - 3 Roch Dunin-Wasowicz, “Long read | Are opinion polls biased towards Leave?”, LSE Blogs, October 29, 2019, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2019/10/29/long-read-are-opinion-polls-pro-leave-biased/>

Part of the problem is that social majorities do not always have a voice or a desire to speak loudly enough to be captured by the radar of public mood. Noisy minorities⁴ can easily skew impressions as much as boisterous leaders claiming that they bespeak the “real” majority view.

Meanwhile, the existence of social taboos about the public expression of particular views in any society may lead to tactical form of public self-censorship—a divergence between the private and publicly expressed views of the individual. ‘Regimes of truth’, Foucault perceptively argued,⁵ always produce ‘subjugated knowledges’—views and voices that have been de-legitimised and suppressed by a hegemonic discourse seeking to regulate knowledge and therefore public discourse itself.

When Nixon, for example, invoked the “silent majority” as the source of his popular mandate⁶ and Vice President Agnew spoke of a small “liberal elite” as the exclusive source of “truth” in their contemporary America,⁷ the elected presidential duo effectively questioned all sorts of orthodoxies about the country’s “mainstream” society. The trope of the “silent majority” lay claim to a social majority that has been ignored, misrepresented by biased media, effectively silenced, and forgotten. It sounds anti-elitist and liberating, mixing lofty principles such as freedom and democracy with the call for radical change. For decades it and its various by-products like the “real people” and so on⁸ have become the discursive staple of right-wing populists across the world,⁹ uniting the language of very different figures such as Geert Wilders, Marine Le Pen and, more recently, the Tea Party and of course Donald Trump.¹⁰ It has also become a favourite electoral stratagem for mainstream political campaigns, such as Vote

4 Lars Rensmann, “The Noisy Counter-Revolution: Understanding the Cultural Conditions and Dynamics of Populist Politics in Europe in the Digital Age”, *Politics and Governance* 5 no. 4 (2017): 123-35.

5 Daniele Lorenzini, “What is a ‘Regime of Truth’?”, *Le Foucauldien* 1 no. 1 (2015), 1.

6 Sarah Thelen, “Mobilizing a Majority: Nixon’s ‘Silent Majority’ Speech and the Domestic Debate over Vietnam”, *Journal of American Studies* 51 no. 3 (2017): 887–914.

7 Jerald Podair, Zach Messitte and Charles Holden, “The Man Who Pioneered Trumpism”, *Washington Post*, November 15, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2018/11/15/man-who-pioneered-trumpism/>.

8 John Keane, “We the People: The Charms and Contradictions of Populism”, *The Conversation*, November 2, 2016, <https://theconversation.com/we-the-people-the-charms-and-contradictions-of-populism-63769>.

9 Desirée Schmuck and Michael Hameleers, “Closer to the People: A Comparative Content Analysis of Populist Communication on Social Networking Sites in Pre- and Post-Election Periods”, *Information, Communication & Society* 23 no. 10 (2020): 1531-48.

10 Mark Mardell, “The Netherlands’ Populist Moment?”, *BBC News*, February 13, 2017, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-38956740>; Megan Galbreath, “An Analysis of Donald Trump and Marine Le Pen”, *Harvard International Review* 38 no. 3 (2017): 7-9.

Leave for the 2016 EU membership referendum in the UK or a series of elections in the 2000s fought by Nicolas Sarkozy as either incumbent or aspiring president.

The populist “silent majority” trope has been repeatedly exposed as a cynical misnomer¹¹ and disparaged by mainstream media and academic research.¹² It may be exactly that of course. Populist forces have rarely reached the status of expressing the views of an enduring social majority. It is also easy to mistake noise for public support, although this is an argument that cuts both ways. However, those who take solace in arguing that populists are propelled by angry—and thus vocal—minorities may be drawing a false sense of security from this comforting illusion. Flimsy electoral results cannot be treated as the sole or most authentic expression of public political views. Voter dealignment from mainstream parties is typically, and misleadingly, lagging behind attitudinal shifts with regard to key political and social issues. In other words, majorities can be, and very often are, less politically progressive or socially/culturally conformist than either their voting behaviour or public opinions may suggest or indicate.

Here’s the thing: the social “mainstream” is a far, far broader patchwork canopy than liberal and/or progressive opinion can comfortably profess. Mainstream acceptability is delineated by widely shared thresholds of acceptability on either side. Like taboos, these thresholds entail particular attitudinal and behavioural jumps that mark the boundaries of political legitimacy and “truth”. It is against these categorical extremes, Uwe Backes argued, that any “majority society” reflects its supposed normality.¹³ Yet, relative silence or lack of voting majorities is not sufficient assurance of robust adherence to the mainstream, let alone of positive or moderate approval for its lofty normative declarations. Supported by rooted and robust Foucauldian “regimes of truth”, as argued above, normative mainstream discourses are powerful enough projections to effectively conceal opposition and drown out public expressions of resentment. Whether, however, relative silence can be taken as tacit or passive approval is another matter.

11 Harry Enten, “Silent Majorities Are a Misnomer”, *CNN*, June 6, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/06/politics/trump-silent-majority-analysis/index.html>.

12 Cas Mudde, “Populists Aren’t a Silent Majority—They’re Just a Loud Minority”, *Guardian*, September 6, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/sep/06/populists-silent-majority-loud-minority>.

13 Uwe Backes, “Meaning and Forms of Political Extremism in Past and Present”, *Central European Political Studies Review* IX no. 4 (2007): 242–62.

To take a recent example, polls conducted during the Black Lives Matter mobilisation in the US in 2020 have encouragingly revealed significant increases in public support against institutionalised racism.¹⁴ Yet, they also typically show ongoing opposition to taking down symbols of the country's imperialist and segregationist past. Supporting anti-racism when asked does not mean actively opposing racism.¹⁵ Protests, especially when they turn violent, can be divisive, pitting ideological support against the (always powerful) "law-and-order" agenda. To declare support for racism publicly remains a very strong taboo; but to invoke "public order"¹⁶ or national identity as under threat by such protests is also a powerful existential tool that adds that all-important conditional "but" to potential declarations of support for a cause.

The search for a political "mainstream" is messy, often self-contradictory, fickle, and difficult to access in sufficiently high resolution. It is more reflective of a continuum of more or less acceptable views than of a stable positive majority. For a politician or movement to claim unique and/or privileged access on the supposed "real" mainstream's behalf is duplicitous hyperbole. But to trust either election results or opinion polls as the more accurate trace of "mainstream" pulse is to put just a bit too much faith on the question asked as well as on the validity of the answers publicly given. The populist claim to give voice to *silent* majorities is more akin to a call for public insurrection by supposed underdogs against certain existing social and political taboos— and a promise of long-overdue redress.¹⁷ Seen from this perspective, it may be easier to comprehend why the populist trope has worked to shock electoral effect too often in recent years; and why it is a mistake to simply brush it aside as a misnomer or as a loud, manipulative social media fad. It is also just a bit closer to an uncomfortable truth that we may wish to admit and act upon: the "mainstream" as a bundle of diverse social majorities (or in electoral parlance, "voting coalitions") is generally less progressive and more erratic than

14 "Poll Shows Strong Public Support for BLM Protests", Hope not Hate, June 26, 2020, <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2020/06/26/poll-shows-strong-public-support-for-blm-protests/>.

15 David Smith, "Nine Out of 10 Americans Say Racism and Police Brutality Are Problems, Poll Finds", *Guardian*, July 8, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jul/08/americans-racism-police-brutality-problems-poll>.

16 Charles M Blow, "'Law and Order' for 'Blacks and Hippies'", *New York Times*, June 21, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/21/opinion/trump-police-reform.html>.

17 Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: SAGE, 2015), Ch. 1.

often assumed.¹⁸ Populists may not be supported by “silent majorities”, but their transgressive arguments speak to, legitimise, and then normalise a number of “subjugated knowledges” that have the power to transform the complexion of the “mainstream”.¹⁹

Dr Aristotle Kallis is a Senior Fellow at CARR and professor of modern and contemporary history at Keele University.

18 Francesco Duina, “The Uncomfortable Truths About Populism”, *LSE Blogs*, June 5, 2020, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2020/06/05/the-uncomfortable-truths-about-populism/>.

19 Julian Göppfarth, “Why We Shouldn’t Call the Far Right an Unpopular Minority”, *Fair Observer*, September 14, 2018, <https://www.fairobsserver.com/region/europe/far-right-populist-parties-sweden-democrats-afd-europe-politics-news-analysis-19001/>.

How Fascists Have Used Panics to Consolidate Power

Roland Clark

Sometimes it is okay to panic. Or at least, some situations demand radical solutions. But when you are up to your eyeballs in judgement against your neighbour for hoarding toilet paper or the government for jeopardising your children's future to sell another barrel of oil, keep in mind that, in interwar Europe at least, fascist politics emerged out of a climate of panic and constant talk of crises. Benito Mussolini rode to power on the claim that anarchist and communist violence was out of the government's control. The massacres of the White Terror in Hungary relied on fears that communists and Jews posed a genuine threat to law and order. Adolf Hitler staged the famous Beer Hall Putsch in the midst of a state of emergency in Bavaria, then used the Reichstag fire of 1933 to end civil liberties and suppress his enemies. Oswald Mosley launched the British Union of Fascists with one speech after another about the dire circumstances British workers found themselves in at the end of the Great Depression. Engelbert Dollfuss shut down Austria's government in 1933 by over-exaggerating a political stalemate that gave him an excuse to attack the Social Democratic Party and launch the Austrian Civil War. Cries about judicial corruption in the case of the embezzler Alexandre Stavisky brought the right-wing Leagues out onto the streets of Paris in February 1934, bringing down Édouard Daladier's government and almost resulting in a coup d'état.

In his influential 1972 book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, the sociologist Stanley Cohen analysed what he called "moral panics".¹ These happen, he said, when the media irresponsibly exaggerates a social problem, demanding radical solutions that are often not even relevant to the problem at hand, and then exacerbates the problem by causing people to over-react to it. His book studied fights on the beaches of Brighton one summer that broke out between two youth subcultures: the Mods and the Rockers. But moral panics are far from being something only for the history books. Panics about refugees and asylum seekers, teenage pregnancy, youth gangs, terrorism, sexual deviants, and stock prices generally work in the same way. The so-called "yellow journalism" of the tabloid press

1 Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London: Routledge, [1972] 2011).

was in full swing by the interwar period, and talk about crises was not just something done by the radical right. But whereas the mainstream liberal press spoke about threats to the proper functioning of the social order, the radical right used the language of warfare and religion to portray corruption scandals or economic disasters as existential threats to the nation. Reporting only those facts which would generate the greatest possible emotional responses, right-wing newspapers and speakers whipped up an atmosphere of fear that helped people feel justified in taking radical steps to protect their communities. In normal times, perhaps it would be abhorrent to ban Jews from public swimming pools, but if Jews were known carriers of disease and parasites then that would be a different matter. Just think of the children!

Especially in its early years, it was not always clear what set fascists apart from the other political options on offer. There was certainly something left-wing about parts of their ideology, but at the same time they managed to gain the support of prominent members of the aristocracy. They talked about nationalism, but so did almost every other political party of the day. They called themselves a party of the future, but few were eager to recreate the societies that had produced the Great War. One thing that fascists did do exceedingly well though, was to make people panic. On street corners, in lecture halls, and in their newspapers, fascists worked hard to transform people's fears—some of which were legitimate, others not—into full-blown moral panics. Moreover, fascists never pointed out problems that they believed could be fixed with a couple of band-aids and a nice cup of tea. Every problem mentioned by the radical right had to be a life-or-death issue that could only be resolved by an almost apocalyptic transformation; restoring order through revolution and democracy through authoritarianism. The fact that fascism emerged from moral panics should never be a reason not to take responsible, decisive action in the face of serious social problems, but as insipid as it seems today when printed on coffee mugs and internet memes, perhaps one of the most profoundly anti-fascist things anyone ever said was: 'Keep calm and carry on!'.

Dr Roland Clark is a Senior Fellow at CARR and senior lecturer in history at the University of Liverpool.

Can the Radical Right's Reductionist Narrative Withstand Real-World Complexity?

Alan Waring

There is a general recognition that major problems and issues of our world, including understanding them and their causes, and proposing remedies and coping strategies, are rarely simple in nature. Complexity theory and the long history of systems science, as exemplified by the work of such authorities as von Bertalanffy,¹ Parsons, Ackoff, Checkland² and others, have demonstrated this truism conclusively. Nevertheless, systems science has always recognized that reductionism also has an important role in conceptualization, theory development, methodology, analysis, problem/issue elicitation, and design of practical interventions.³ However, that role is meant to be a controlled and targeted one, to be used judiciously only when appropriate to a particular topic or juncture within a larger and more holistic strategy, and not to be used as the exclusive quick-fix approach to all “problem solving”. Regrettably, there is abundant evidence that radical right leaders, ideologues, politicians, administrations, opinion-formers and others have an overwhelming tendency to promulgate, often dogmatically and even ruthlessly, simple analyses and solutions to complex real-world issues. Unsurprisingly, these rarely work and often make things far worse.

Characteristics and fallacies of radical right reductionism

The radical right exhibits reductionist thinking and narratives in two main ways: 1) trivializing or minimizing the nature and impact of particular risks (and sometimes maximizing them), contrary to known science or factual evidence, and 2) over-simplifying specific problems or issues, or inventing false and unscientific cause-effect explanations for them. The apparent motives for why the radical right engages in such egregious

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- 1 Ludwig von Bertalanffy, “The History and Status of General Systems Theory,” *Academy of Management Journal* 15 no. 4 (1972): 407-26.
 - 2 Peter Checkland, *Systems Thinking, Systems Practice: Includes a 30-year Retrospective* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 1999).
 - 3 Alan Waring, *Practical Systems Thinking* (Aldershot, UK: Thomson/Cengage, 1996), 62-4.

manipulation and fakery centre on four processes, which they believe will bring their cause political and populist benefits:

1) **Authoritarian revisionism**

The radical right indulges in the erasure from their narrative of inconvenient or unwelcome facts from the accepted knowledge base of history and science. For example, protagonists pretend that the vast body of knowledge on the complexity of problems and issues relating to society, science, economics, health, social reforms, human rights, foreign relations, and governance in general, as developed over the past half century, is irrelevant, or is fake science, or never even existed. The radical right policies, narratives and actions of the Trump administration provide stark *in extremis* examples of such revisionism on many fronts and in various forms.

The radical right seeks to regress to the “simple truths and values” of an imaginary past world of the 1960s and earlier, when relatively simple mechanistic, biological or economic “explanations” provided a comforting illusion of order, certainty, neatly stacked “problems-and-solutions”, and simplistic salvation models and “programs” for correcting deviations from their dogma and their assertions of what constitutes the correct normative order. Critiques,⁴ of the “fallacy of predetermination” and other reductionist fallacies, and critiques⁵ of the poor predictability of non-holistic programmatic change, have no currency in the radical right world, since these expose their inherent flaws.

Examples of radical right salvation “cure-alls” range from Trump’s Mexican wall and Orbán’s anti-Muslim border controls, to the palingenetic ultranationalist ethno-religious and political cleansing demanded by the extreme right, to radical right advocacy of, or sympathy with, discredited eugenics theories of inferiority of certain races. As allegedly inferior races will be an unacceptable drain on society and the economy, eugenics advocates argue that they should be “dealt with” (echoing the Nazi *Rassenhygiene* laws and Eugen Fischer’s infamous Aktion T4 extermination program in Hitler’s Germany). For example, Prime Minister Boris Johnson

4 Henry Mintzberg, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning: Reconceiving Roles for Planning, Plans, Planners* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Henry Mintzberg, “Rethinking Strategic Planning, Part 1: Pitfalls and Fallacies,” *Long Range Planning* 27 no. 3 (1994): 12-21.

5 Michael Beer, Russell Eisenstat, and Bert Spector, “Why Change Programs Don’t Produce Change,” *Harvard Business Review* 68 no. 6 (1990): 158-166.

refused to apologize for, or dismiss, a policy adviser who suggested publicly that discriminatory policies based on eugenics were warranted.⁶

Complexity theory regards real-world problems and issues as “messes”, i.e. systems of problems that defy resolution simply by picking off component problems one-by-one or even in groups, because in doing so the “mess” simply adapts itself and survives in a modified and unresolved form. Messes require the systemic whole to be tackled holistically. Despite the overwhelming trend over the past forty-five years among governments, policy research groups, and academia towards adopting holistic approaches, the radical right have persisted with their reductionist and revisionist worldview. For example, as I’ve noted,⁷ some of the radical right (e.g. Reisman) seriously argue for reintroduction of minimalist social, employment and environmental policies similar to those of Victorian times, and the wholesale removal of protective legislation for work people. Nevertheless, because radical right propaganda overall offers a seductive “salvation” model, as the 21st century has progressed, radical right salvation ideas have gained widespread populist support among weary and fearful societies demanding “solutions”. Moreover, there has also been a resurgence of reductionist theories and arguments in some areas of academia, e.g., recent scientific papers that airbrush out the body of knowledge on complexity and advocate rehashed reductionist theories on scientific management and salvationist programmatic change models from the 1960s.

2) Manipulation of risk perceptions

US President Trump’s persistent official policy was to deny that climate change exists or, if it does, then it is neither human-created nor a major threat to the world.⁸ That policy implies a belief that there is no systemic cause-effect relationship between human activity, global warming/climate change, and extreme weather events. Therefore, no special preventative measures or contingency planning are required, and existing emergency response provisions are adequate since extreme weather events will remain rare, unpredictable, and non-catastrophic. In radical right terms, the

6 “Andrew Sabisky, No 10 Adviser Resigns Over Alleged Race Comments,” *BBC News*, February 18, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-51538493>.

7 Alan Waring, “The Five Pillars of Occupational Safety and Health in a Climate of Authoritarian Socio-political Climates,” *Safety Science* 117 (2019): 152-63.

8 Alan Waring, “The Alt-Right, Environmental Issues, and Global Warming,” in *The New Authoritarianism Vol 1: A Risk Analysis of the US Alt-Right Phenomenon*, ed. A. Waring (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2018), 273-301.

“problem” and its risks are thereby reduced to zero, as they do not exist. The motive behind Trump’s extraordinary “wishful thinking” position is open to conjecture.

As another example, in radical right terms, MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) is reduced to a set of allegedly relatively minor health threats whereas [quoting discredited quack science from a struck-off physician] MMR vaccine is falsely cited as a major cause of autism in children. The underlying justification appears to emanate from the radical right’s fear of removal of the freedom of parental choice coupled with a belief that scientists who support vaccination (i.e., the vast majority, authorities such as the CDC, WHO, etc.) are part of a left-wing conspiracy to undermine conservative governance and the economy. Radical right supporters are heavily represented among anti-vax supporters, who include Trump. In February 2020, he also contradicted the CDC and WHO on the seriousness of the coronavirus threat, dismissing the scale of the threat as a “hoax” and claiming that his media enemies were using false coronavirus stories as a weapon to undermine him politically. Subsequently, he has persistently sought to “talk down” the COVID-19 threat to public health and has strongly advocated removal of the lockdown restrictions while the pandemic was still raging and before safe to do so, apparently on economic grounds, a belief that health experts were exaggerating the risks, and to avoid damage to his re-election chances.

While the radical right artificially deflates some risks, it also inflates others. For example, Trump has persistently inflated the incidence and risk of violent criminality among immigrants (whether legal or illegal) from Mexico, contrary to the known facts. He has also similarly falsely inflated the risk of terrorism from Muslim immigrants and visitors to the US.

3) Confirmation Bias in Propaganda

The radical right exhibits a strong preference for any evidence, opinion, or assertion which they believe strengthens their case. While not unique in seeking to present their best case, the radical right stand out in the relentless and aggressive way they disseminate their propaganda by all forms of media, especially online and social media. Radical right leaders, politicians, ideologues, opinion formers, commentators, and supportive journalists selectively include in their narratives only those items and assertions that tend to confirm and support radical right objectives and, conversely, exclude any material that contradicts or challenges radical right ideology or that casts the radical right in a poor light.

Thus, for example, the recent sudden increases in MMR cases (including deaths) officially attributed to anti-vax campaigns supported by the radical right will be ignored, while stories of populist support for the anti-vax position will receive favourable publicity. Stories of heroism of firefighters and emergency services workers in the conflagrations in California and Australia will dominate the narratives of radical right administrations and their supporters, while climate change (if mentioned at all) will be vehemently denied as a primary causal factor in the fires. Viktor Orbán will boast of a huge success in his “Hungary for Hungarians only” policy in the way his massive border fencing and strict controls have stopped the alleged Muslim takeover of the country, while ignoring the fact that historically Hungary has only ever had a miniscule Muslim population—a classic false proposition to evoke fear in the native population followed by their relief when the (non-existent) threat is neutralized. If the non-existent Muslim hordes have not entered the country, then populists believe that clearly Orbán’s policy was correct and effective!

4) Mendacity and amoral calculation

Radical right leaders and supporters persistently lie in order to advance their political ideology, persuade the public of their righteousness, and to cover up their own bad conduct. For example, according to the *Washington Post*,⁹ by October 2019 President Trump had made 13,435 false or misleading statements since taking office. By 10 December 2019, that number had risen to 15,413.¹⁰ While it may be anticipated that all politicians “stretch the truth” to their advantage, and some brazenly lie from time to time, the scale of Trump’s mendacity is exceptional and unprecedented. Trump, his administration and the radical right establishment have turned amoral calculation, lying, and dissemination of false facts and fake news into a central plank of official policy rather than just used as an ad hoc convenience.

Radical right reductionism has played well to a populist audience looking for some kind of salvation from perceived problems and threats. The radical right has been skilful in weaving into its narrative an artful rhetoric and imagery concerning problems and threats that are in some

9 Glenn Kessler, Salvador Rizzo and Meg Kelly, “President Trump Has Made False or Misleading Statements Over Days,” *The Washington Post*, October 14, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/10/14/president-trump-has-made-false-or-misleading-claims-over-days/>.

10 Nancy LeTourneau, “The Magnitude of Trump’s Lies,” *The Washington Monthly*, December 12, 2019, <https://washingtonmonthly.com/2019/12/17/the-magnitude-of-trumps-lies/>.

cases real but mixed up with far more that are exaggerated or invented. Playing on populist fears, the radical right then proposes itself and its policies as their only salvation. This populist support, based on psychological dependence, may work for a time if the promise of salvation seems plausible and realistic. However, ultimately support is likely to wane as enacted radical right policies fail in the face of real-world complexity.

Dr Alan Waring is a Policy and Practitioner Fellow at CARR and adjunct professor at the Centre for Risk and Decision Sciences (CERIDES) at the European University Cyprus.

Alternative Epistemologies of the Radical Right: How Grand Narratives and the Quest for Truth Offer Recognition and a Sense of Belonging

Mario Peucker

In early 2019, during ethnographic fieldwork on radical right movements in Australia, I attended a far-right rally against allegedly “African gang crimes” in Melbourne. I spoke to a young man in his twenties about his reasons for taking part in the protest. In response he alluded that the problem was much bigger than the criminal behaviour of some African kids, but he was reluctant to explain his ominous insinuations: ‘I can’t tell you. You have to find out yourself. You just have to read the right things’. He appeared very proud of having found the “right” sources and discovered the truth independently and on his own accord. The truth needed to be earned, he seemed to believe, it can’t simply be passed on. There was a sense of superiority in his words as he had travelled this arduous path towards his “red pill” enlightenment, and he was now sending me on my own journey to discover this truth.

This experience stayed with me, but I was unable to make deeper sense of it until, almost one year later, I interviewed a group of people who had participated in anti-Islam protests and other far-right rallies for several years. During our conversation they also spoke at length about their long way of “educating themselves” and “doing their own research” gradually leading them to what they considered the truth. They were convinced that a secretive globalist cabal directly controls local council and governments to “break” society and implement the New World Order (NWO). Such NWO claims are among the most popular conspiratorial myths within radical right milieus in Australia and globally. In general, and also within this specific group, they serve as a grand narrative that ties a range of beliefs around mostly unrelated issue—from immigration, Islam and anti-Semitism (absent in my interviews) to socialism, climate change, gender identity, vaccination, and government actions—into a seemingly coherent system.

Leaving aside the sometimes obscure and contradictory nature of the arguments put forward by the people in this group, what became clear is that their personal quest for the truth was a process with complex

psychological and social implications. Again, there was this strong sense of pride in their claimed capacity to look behind “fake news” in mainstream media and deliberate indoctrination attempts by the government and its education system. Although they all shared the same convictions around NWO, none of the interviewed individuals wanted to appear as if they had simply adopted the views of others (not even of those in their own group). Instead, they all insisted on having done their own independent “research”, and they simply arrived at the same truth from different angles, which was further proof that their convictions were true. They felt empowered and a sense of recognition and self-worth as a result of their personal quest, but these processes have also strengthened their collective identity and belonging to a community (in-group) with supposedly superior knowledge.

The vast literature on (radical) political and social movements¹ and violent extremism² has highlighted that such psychological and social factor are often pivot in explaining the appeal of far-right ideologies and groups. The analysis of these interviews underscores this and demonstrates the *interplay* between these factors and the specific ideological narratives. The people in this group have found recognition, respect, and social connectedness through their radical right activism and their pursuit of the truth.

There were also other social dynamics at play. Whilst emphasizing their individual autodidactic efforts, the interviewed individuals also stated that, once they have done their own research, they would come together and share with each other. This was described by one person as ‘ripple effect’, and another one stated:

As we learned more, we developed...and we all come back together, it's about networking too. We all share. [Person X] may find out more information to do with Islam and Christians, [person Z] may find out something about Communism...we all learn from each other.

Through these processes of information sharing and mutual exchange of personal experiences, they “often find common ground”. This is how

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- 1 James M. Jasper, “Emotions and Social Movements: Twenty Years of Theory and Research,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 37, no. 1 (2011): 285-303.
 - 2 Hedieh Mirahmadi, “Building Resilience against Violent Extremism: A Community-Based Approach,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 668, no. 1 (2016): 129-44; Matteo Vergani, Muhammad Iqbal, Ekin Ilbahar and Greg Barton, “The Three Ps of Radicalization: Push, Pull and Personal. A Systematic Scoping Review of the Scientific Evidence about Radicalization Into Violent Extremism,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43, no. 10 (2020): 854-85.

initially unrelated fears and concerns around issues such as Islam, vaccination, and marriage equality are continuously solidified, expanded, and successively bundled together under a coherent grand narrative—in this case, the conspiracy myth of the NWO. The accounts of several members of this group highlighted these processes: ‘When we first came together it was just about Islam, but it is about so much more now’.

This *process* of “doing my own research” and sharing it within a group of likeminded others, as well as the *outcome* of these processes, i.e., the belief in an ideological meta-narrative that identifies a secrete global elite and their “puppets” in government as being responsible for all social ills, form an alternative system of knowledge. Similar to dogmatic interpretation of religious belief systems, it offers morally charged, simplistic answers to highly complex questions. This quasi-religious epistemology, whilst rooted in a combination of ultra-nationalistic and aggressively anti-egalitarian tropes, draws heavily on conspiratorial thinking. It is positioned in explicit opposition to the established “mainstream” epistemology, based on reason, science and provable facts, and controlled by the very same elites allegedly responsible for the demise of society. As such, this conspiracy theory-driven knowledge system reinforces boundaries between in-group and out-group, whereby strengthening internal solidarity and belonging and discrediting the others who are considered to be part of the establishment: local councils, governments, universities, and mainstream media. Any attempt by these “elite” agencies to challenge the in-group’s convictions, for instance through rational arguments or counternarratives, may backfire as it can be regarded as a deliberate manipulation attempt by the out-group and hence ‘perpetuate the original conspiracy theories’, as Holbrook recently argued.³

The alternative epistemologies within the radical right are powerful and difficult to refute from outside, also because they often serve a deeper psychological purpose for the individual. They offer something that people who feel disenfranchised may seek and feel they deserve but society has denied them: a sense of recognition, control and power in a social environment, both locally and globally, that is complexly interconnected, constantly changing and characterised by uncertainty and ambiguity.

Dr Mario Peucker is a Senior Fellow at CARR and senior research fellow at the Institute for Sustainable Industries and Liveable Cities at Victoria University, Melbourne.

3 Donald Holbrook, “The Challenge of Conspiracy Theories for Strategic Communications,” *The RUSI Journal* 165, no. 1 (2020): 26-36.

Radical Right Voters and Democratic Support

Nicolas Bichay

The rise of radical right parties is considered by many to be one of the largest modern threats to liberal democracy.¹ There is a strong pattern of populist and radical leaders eroding constraints on the executive,² diminishing press freedom,³ and harming the quality of elections to benefit themselves.⁴

But what about these parties' voters? Do radical right voters exhibit overtly anti-democratic rhetoric? In other words, do voters of radical right parties knowingly hold and agree with anti-democratic attitudes? Or, rather, do they support these parties for other ideological reasons, while disagreeing with their anti-democratic tendencies?

On the one hand, it may simply be the case that voters support a radical right party for their policy proposals, for example their attention to immigration, the global economy, and promise of removing corrupt elites from government that, in their mind, other mainstream parties ignore. In such cases, cognitive dissidence may play a role in their determination that such parties are not really a threat to democracy and claims to the contrary are simply "fake news". Or perhaps voters do believe these claims yet dub them a "necessary evil" worth the cost to restore the country to its "rightful place".

On the other hand, there is a possibility that voters acknowledge the harms to democracy caused by the party they support and agree with these anti-democratic positions. The rhetoric of these parties is often categorized

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- 1 Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Erica Frantz, "How Democracies Fall Apart," *Foreign Affairs*, December 5, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-12-05/how-democracies-fall-apart>.
 - 2 Christian Houle and Paul D. Kenny, "The Political and Economic Consequences of Populist Rule in Latin America," *Government and Opposition* 53, no. 2 (2016): 256-87.
 - 3 Kareem Shaheen, "Turkish Journalists Accuse Erdoğan of Media Witch-hunt," *The Guardian*, May 2, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/02/turkish-journalists-accuse-erdogan-of-media-witch-hunt>.
 - 4 "Although Parliamentary Elections in Hungary Offered Voters a Diverse Choice, Ruling Party Enjoyed Undue Advantage, Say International Observers," *Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development*, April 7, 2014, <https://www.oscepa.org/documents/election-observation/election-observation-statements/hungary/press-releases-12/2152-2014-parliamentary/file>.

as anti-pluralist,⁵ with both voters and candidates believing that their party is the only one capable of solving the nation's current problems. Thus, voters may be interpreting this situation as one which necessitates removing any limitations to the party's rule. This scenario surely constitutes the more dangerous situation.

Public opinion data

For all the work done examining the relationship between the radical right and democracy, this important aspect of voter opinion still remains unclear. In fact, recent work has suggested that radical right voters are actually more supportive of democracy than their centrist counterparts,⁶ further complicating the issue. However, there is some anecdotal evidence that voters may indeed knowingly hold anti-democratic views. For example, the 2017 referendum that greatly consolidated executive power⁷ in Turkey held very high support from voters of the ruling populist right Justice and Development Party (90%), while maintaining overwhelming opposition from supporters of all other parties.⁸

To gain more insight on this important question, I analysed public opinion data from the European Value Survey (EVS). The EVS is a large-scale public opinion survey that has been conducted every nine years in Europe since 1981. It asks several questions with regard to democratic support on topics ranging from the importance of free and fair elections to the appropriateness of the military seizing power. I used these questions as a way to measure democratic support amongst respondents. Following Rooduijn et al.'s classification of what constitutes a radical right party,⁹ I outline the differences in opinion on democracy between EVS respondents who supported a radical right party, compared to supporters of all other parties below.

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- 5 Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).
 - 6 David Adler, "Centrists Are the Most Hostile to Democracy, Not Extremists," *The New York Times*, May 23, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/05/23/opinion/international-world/centrists-democracy.html?mtref=t.co&gwh=9094043E46C8EA5E9225B9B7F3611AE3&gwt=regi&assetType=REGIWALL>.
 - 7 "Turkey Referendum Grants President Erdogan Sweeping New Powers," *BBC News*, April 16, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39617700>.
 - 8 Evren Doganc, "Turkish Referendum," *Ipsos*, April 20, 2017, <https://www.ipsos.com/en/turkish-referendum>.
 - 9 Matthijs Rooduijn et al., "The PopuList: An Overview of Populist, Far Right, Far Left and Eurosceptic Parties in Europe," 2019, <https://popu-list.org>.

Question	Non-Radical- Right Support	Radical-Right Support
Having a democratic political system is “very good”	60%	45%
Having a strong leader who doesn’t bother with elections or parliament is “very good”	6%	7%
Free and fair elections are an “essential characteristic of democracy”	61%	58%
Having the army rule the country is “very bad”	65%	46%
The army takes over when government is incompetent is an “essential characteristic of democracy”	5%	9%

It seems evident from EVS survey data that, at least in some cases, radical right voters tend to hold more anti-democratic views. Overall, radical right voters are 25% less likely to classify a democratic system as “very good”, vis-à-vis their non-radical right counterparts. Digging deeper, in many cases, the results point to radical right voters seemingly approving an authoritarian consolidation of power and ignoring checks and balances, while simultaneously maintaining support for free and fair elections. For example, while radical right voters were nearly as likely to maintain the essentiality of free and fair elections compared to other voters, they were much less likely to decry military coups and rule.

This variation in voter preferences mirrors rhetoric of radical right leaders themselves. Much of the radical right electoral rhetoric focuses on taking power away from the corrupt elite and rightfully returning it to the masses.¹⁰ Rarely do radical leaders openly advocate removing people from the decision-making process. Rather, they are more concerned with removing constraints to their ruling, once democratically elected. Take again, for example, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s actions in Turkey. Considered as leading to a breakdown of liberal democracy, his

10 Müller, *What Is Populism?*.

constitutional changes dramatically increased the power of the executive and abolished the office of prime minister. Still, these changes did little to affect voting rights in Turkey (and were even enacted via a popular referendum).

Given the above, it appears that not only are radical right voters aware of their anti-democratic predispositions, but these predispositions seem to mirror the traits observed in party leader rhetoric. They are more likely to support the idea of eroding constraints on their rule, yet at the same time are no more willing to castigate the importance of free and fair elections. This may seem a subtle difference but is an important one. When radical right parties demonstrate values counter to democracy, their voters believe them to be a necessary process of which they will benefit.¹¹ As such, they stand for policies that give the party they support more power, at the expense of democracy. When it comes to seizing their own power, however, in the form of fairly run elections, they seem to remain opposed.

Nicolas Bichay is a Doctoral Fellow at CARR and doctoral candidate in political science at Michigan State University.

11 Müller, *What Is Populism?*.

Nationalism and Memory

Grieving Greater Hungary: Trianon, Orbán, and the Hungarian Radical Right

Katherine Kondor

In the Hungarian collective memory, few events evoke as much emotion as the Treaty of Trianon. Referring to the peace treaty signed at the Grand Trianon Palace at Versailles on 4 June 1920, this treaty meant that Hungary lost about two-thirds of its territories. The end of the First World War marked the end of the Austro-Hungarian empire, meaning the federalisation of both Austria and Hungary. With this came the Trianon peace treaty, where Hungary lost most of its national minorities: Slovaks, Romanians, Croats, and Serbs, among others. This treaty meant families were divided along national borders,¹ and many ethnic Hungarians now found themselves members of other nation-states. Parts of Northern Hungary went to the Slovaks and Czechs, the South went to the Serbs, Croatians, and Slovenians, and Transylvania became part of Romania. 1941-42 briefly saw a reversal of the treaty and reinstatement of lands as, under the Hungarian regent Admiral Miklós Horthy, Hungary fought on the side of Nazi Germany.

In the 1930s, the extreme right began to centre around Ferenc Szálasi, leader of the newly formed Party for National Will; the party was characterised by militant anti-Semitism and irredentism, specifically seeking to reunite the Hungarian people of the Carpathian Basin under Hungarian leadership. Later, Szálasi's ideas of "Hungarism" and the reversal of the Trianon treaty became central to the Hungarian radical right, most specifically to the new Hungarian National Socialist Party and later to the infamous Arrow Cross Party and Hungarist Movement. Their ideas were a mix of anti-Semitism and fascism, believing that powers such as Great Britain, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union should be dissolved, and Hungarians (along with Latin, German, Slavic, and Islamic nations) should become *the* leading world race.

1 "VARIOUS: Ethnic Hungarians Remember How Their Families Were Divided by the Trianon Peace Treaty of 1920," *Reuters*, June 7, 2010, <https://reuters.screenocean.com/record/478169>.

These ideas of Hungarianism and the reformation of “Greater Hungary” are now central to Hungary’s radical right. “Greater Hungary” is recognised in the form of an idea, with the concept symbolising the reunification of all ethnic Hungarians. It can also be represented physically by the image of present day Hungary set within the pre-Trianon borders of the country, which often appears as a form of pan-Hungarism on decals, jewellery, and clothing. In another incarnation, it appears as a common chant used by radical right groups—“*Vesszen Trianon!*” (“Down with Trianon!”).

Viktor Orbán and his government have also been often accused of revisionist approaches. Indeed, the Fidesz government instituted the opportunity for Hungarian citizenship² to all Hungarians living outside of the nation-state’s borders; those ethnic Hungarians granted citizenship from Romania, Ukraine, and Serbia have meant a large electoral boost for Orbán’s Fidesz. Additionally, Fidesz have altered the national curriculum³ to be “more patriotic”, replaced the EU flag⁴ on the Hungarian parliament building with that of the Szeklers (a Hungarian-speaking ethnic group in Transylvania), openly support autonomy for the Szeklerlands in Transylvania,⁵ regularly speak at the annual Bálványos Summer Free University and summer camp in the Szeklerlands, and have been financing⁶ Hungarian-language media,⁷ football clubs, and churches in Transylvania.

Orbán’s gestures towards the Transylvanian-Hungarian and Szekler minorities have not gone unnoticed by the Romanian government, incidentally led by their very own (Ludovic) Orban, who reacted in 2020 by

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- 2 Lucie Szymanowska, “The iMplementation of the Hungarian Citizenship Law,” *OSW*, February 2, 2011, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2011-02-02/imple mentation-hungarian-citizenship-law>.
 - 3 Edit Inotai, “Democracy Digest: Hungary’s Curriculum cCusade,” *Balkan Insight*, February 7, 2020, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/02/07/democracy-digest-hungarys-curri culum-crusade/>.
 - 4 Csaba Tóth, “President of Hungarian Parliament Orders Removal of EU Flag,” *Buda pest Beacon*, November 17, 2014, <https://budapestbeacon.com/president-hungarian-par liament-orders-removal-eu-flag/>.
 - 5 For example: Stefano Bottoni, “Szeklerland as the New Crimea?,” *Visegrad Insight*, May 16, 2014, <https://visegradinsight.eu/szeklerland-as-a-new-crimea1652014/>; Cristian Gherasim, “Bucharest and Budapest in ‘Autonomy’ Region Row,” *EU Observer*, May 4, 2020, <https://euobserver.com/political/148232>.
 - 6 Akos Keller-Alant, “Living Like in Hungary: Orban Bankrolling Romania ‘Ethnic Par allelism’,” *Balkan Insight*, January 30, 2020, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/01/30/liv ing-like-in-hungary-orban-bankrolling-romania-ethnic-parallelism/>.
 - 7 Craig Turp-Balazs, “New Report Reveals Hungary’s Creeping Influence on Transylva nia Media Market,” *Emerging Europe*, July 18, 2019, <https://emerging-europe.com/news/new-report-reveals-hungarys-creeping-influence-on-transylvania-media-market/>.