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ABOUT THE TIMBRO AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM INDEX

Authoritarian Populism has established itself as the third ideological force in European politics. This poses a long-term threat to liberal democracies. The Timbro Authoritarian Populism Index (TAP) continuously explores and analyses electoral data in order to improve the knowledge and understanding of the development among politicians, media and the general public. TAP contains data stretching back to 1980, which makes it the most comprehensive index of populism in Europe.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

• 26.8 percent of voters in Europe – more than one in four – cast their vote for an authoritarian populist party last time they voted in a national election.

• Voter support for authoritarian populists increased in all six elections in Europe during 2018 and has on an aggregated level increased in ten out of the last eleven elections.

• The combined support for left- and right-wing populist parties now equals the support for Social democratic parties and is twice the size of support for liberal parties.

• Right-wing populist parties are currently growing more rapidly than ever before and have increased their voter support with 33 percent in four years.

• Left-wing populist parties have stagnated and have a considerable influence only in southern Europe. The median support for left-wing populist in Europe is 1.3 percent.

• Extremist parties on the left and on the right are marginalised in almost all of Europe with negligible voter support and almost no political influence.

• Almost every other government includes or relies on populists: authoritarian populists are part of eleven out of 33 governments and offer parliamentary support in an additional four countries.

• Hungary, Greece and Italy are the three countries where the support for authoritarian populist parties is strongest, while the weakest support is found in Malta, Ireland and the United Kingdom.
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As the 2010s is nearing its end, authoritarian populists in Europe are stronger than ever before. The 2019 edition of Timbro Authoritarian Populism Index shows that 2018 was the best year to date for populist parties across Europe. Today, their average voter support is at 22.2 percent. This is an increase with 1.5 percent compared to 2017. In addition, this is the second biggest increase on record between two consecutive years.

In reality, however, the populist support is even stronger. Populist parties attract voters especially in populous countries. If the average is based on 264 million European voters as a whole, instead of being divided among the 33 countries that are included in the study, the average comes to 26.8 percent. In other words, while the average support for populist parties in Europe is 22.2 percent it is also true that more than one in four European voters – more than 71 million voters – cast their vote for a populist party last time they voted in a national election.

In recent years, populist voter support has been turned into unprecedented levels of political power and influence. Today, populist parties are part of every third European government. Four member states of the EU – Poland, Hungary, Italy, and Greece – have governments solely formed by populist parties. In addition, populist parties are part of coalitions in seven more countries: Norway, Finland, Switzerland, Austria, Lithuania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia. In Denmark, Czech Republic, Portugal, and the United Kingdom, populist parties offer support to non-populist governments.

In 2017, after what was described as populist setbacks in the Netherlands, France and United Kingdom, a narrative was established that assumed that “peak populism” had been reached. Brexit and the election of Donald Trump were taken as evidence that populism had reached its zenith, and that voters now shied away from the consequences of their choices. Since then, nothing has happened that confirms this supposition. To the contrary, national elections in 2018 show that populists dominate the political scene like never before. Populist parties make gains in every single election. We are in “[…] the beginning, not the end, of a new era of great churn and change,” argues Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin in National Populism. Indeed we are.

The era of the parties of the masses seems to be over. That was a time when voters of European democracies not only voted for but also identified with a specific party. The old order has been crushed, but not through misfortune or by mistake. The immigration issue has like no other rocked the old structures. Parties of the masses always relied on vulnerable alliances between different voter or interest groups. Ideology pointed out a direction for what became the joint project. Environmental and European issues dealt severe blows to the old order, but it was immigration that really wrecked the timeworn edifice.

Party politics is a zero-sum game. Gains for populist parties are made entirely at the expense of established parties. Stunning defeats of the Social Democrats in Germany, Netherlands and France in 2017 were followed by the worst result ever in Sweden and the worst since 1925 in Luxembourg. Meanwhile, the Christian Democrats’ election results were historically bad in Luxembourg.

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and in the regional elections in Bavaria, Germany’s most populous state. Springtime for the new parties spells autumn for the old.

2019 looks set to be an even more intense year in Europe with at least nine countries having national elections: Estonia, Finland, Spain, Greece, Belgium, Switzerland, Poland, Denmark, and Portugal. In addition to these there are also elections to the European Parliament. In four of the national elections, populist parties will meet the voters from a position within the government.

Received truths about populist parties losing voter support when they have to assume responsibility cannot be generalised. The multitude of effects from political responsibility only in three Scandinavian countries show this with clarity. The Norwegian Progress Party (FrP) and the Finn’s Party (PS) took part in coalition governments beginning in 2013 and 2015, respectively, while the Danish People’s Party (DF) has remained outside government while exercising influence on various centre-right governments from their position as kingmakers in parliament. The FrP was re-elected to government in 2017, losing a mere percentage point, and remains the third biggest party in the polls. PS on the other hand left the government and has lost half of its electoral support, while a splinter party - SIN - remains in government and struggles to pass the threshold to parliament. And in Denmark, the DF has seen very stable opinion polls through four years of supporting the centre-right government. Already these three countries are enough to defuse seemingly obvious conclusions about what happens when populists are put in power. Different things happen depending on the circumstances.

It is also high time to stop thinking of these parties as threats, challenges or newcomers. They are now established parts of party systems, the basic foundations of which they themselves have changed. Among the 55 most successful populist parties, only 16 were founded after the turn of the century. More than half (28) were founded prior to 2000.

Drawing a line between populist and non-populist parties is getting harder by the minute. Their rhetoric overlaps their policy proposals and their world-views.

Most importantly in the long-term, the populist world-view – that politics should be framed as a conflict between the people and the elite – has become part and parcel also for other parties as well as for intellectuals and political commentators. During the 1960s and 1970s, Marxist ideas had far more influence on the institutions of society than was merited by the importance of the communist parties. In a similar way, neo-liberal ideas were influential during the 1980s in spite of weak support among political parties. Today, populist ideas are being spread by considerably more numerous and stronger forces than the populist parties in themselves.

It is tempting to assume the populist’s gaudy idioms, but the differences between establishment and populism shouldn’t be exaggerated. The populist parties do not entail the destruction of democracy. They often propose a different version of democracy, but they are also characterised by respect for some of the basic principles of democratic majority rule. In practical politics we also find considerable overlap with the established parties. Many right-wing populist parties have a pragmatic, middle-of-the-road view on economics while left-wing populist parties often show genuine respect for minority rights. These circumstances can be evaluated in different ways, but they constitute an indispensable aspect of the analysis.

One can even claim that they to at least a limited extent vitalise democracy. The decline in voter participation in some countries has been halted. Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) got most of its votes from previous non-voters. In some cases, populists offer an alternative for disillusioned voters that had given up on the system. From the perspective of representation of different opinions, the
widening of possibilities within the party system is democratically beneficial.

The exaggeration of the threat in the shape of full-scale mobilisation against anything that gives off even a whiff of populism is harmful. It over-emphasises the differences between populists and establishment, underestimates the degree of mainstreaming of the anti-establishment parties and softens the still vital differences that exist between left and right.

Conversely, however, one shouldn’t downplay what is actually at stake. Since the first decades after the Second World War, European politics have been characterised by its middle ground. Social Democrats, Liberals, Christian Democrats, and Conservatives in Scandinavia and Northwest Europe have shared a remarkably similar view on representative democracy. It has combined basic respect for majority rule combined with a gradual expansion of individual rights. These rights have been constitutionally secured and/or protected by international agreements beyond the reach of fleeting parliamentary majorities. There has also been strong support for independent courts, independent media, and mechanisms defending minorities against majority oppression. During the 1980s, parties emerging from the environmentalist movement championed the same values, as did several reformed communist parties after 1990. As a consequence of these shared views, political rhetoric and aesthetics - as opposed to political content - have seldom changed, even when political power has shifted between parties or blocs.

Europe’s identity and self-perception have come to build upon these liberal, democratic institutions and values, as they have been transferred to shared institutions—EU, European Council, OSCE—and paved the way for fledgling democracies from Southern and Eastern Europe to join the European project.

This development has also created a largely shared view on important aspects of the political content. For decades, almost every established party in Europe has been supportive of the European Union, and most of them have held a basically positive attitude towards economic and cultural globalisation.

This state of affairs is severely challenged by the populist movement. A few years ago, BBC described Law and Justice (PiS) and Fidesz, the governing parties in Poland and Hungary and currently Europe’s most successful populist parties, as challengers to, “the European consensus and politics as usual.” That analysis is still valid.

There does not exist one single label that can accurately capture each and every one of the 267 parties that are included in this index. Not only because of the obvious variation between so many parties in so many countries. It is also because these parties are primarily defined by what they are against. Every party is radically opposed to what they describe as the center of each country’s political arena. Some pose a challenge from the left, others from the right, and yet others by rejecting the division between right and left. Along the same lines, some use conventional ideological labels – socialism, conservatism, nationalism – while others reject the very idea of ideologies and instead refer to common sense or the will of the people.

From an analytical perspective, three ideas emerge as especially distinct: nationalism, populism and anti-capitalism. There are some parties that comprise all three, many include two, every party in this index represent at least one of them.

The parties are also consistently characterised by their varying degree of radicalism. Liberal nationalism, populism aimed at real existing corruption, or measured anti-capitalism don’t qualify for inclusion. Every party that is included calls for radical change with respect to one or more of above-mentioned positions.

In order to capture this paradox – that parties that typically are defined by what they are against (the elite, the establishment, the system) also to a considerable extent represent coherent sets of ideas – I have chosen the wide-ranging label of authoritarian populism. The benefits of this concept is that it captures the common denominator for both left-wing and right-wing populists, while at the same time focusing on that which from a liberal perspective is especially problematic: the lack of respect for division of powers and minority rights; the impatience with democratic procedures; and the alarming perspective on politics as a conflict between a homogenous people and a corrupt elite.

The most basic populist assertion is that the conflict between elite and people supercedes all other conflicts. According to some—mainly left-wing—populist parties, the left/right spectrum is still a valid dimension, while others regard this conflict as a mere charade created to convolute the elites’ attempts to control the people. Regardless, socio-economic divides are of secondary importance to all populists.

Left-wing populist parties almost always describe themselves as belonging to the left. They do not, however, regard Social Democrats as part of the left, but dismiss them as post-political and/or neo-liberal. Hence, they inevitably propose a deeply populistic worldview, where they alone represent the people, while every other party is part of the establishment working against the people.

In contrast to political style, this idea-based content exclusively separates populist parties. Other parties don’t assume a worldview where a singular elite is in opposition to the people. This is an exclusively populist idea in the sense that it is shared by all populist parties while being rejected by all non-populist parties.

Authoritarian populism is an analytical category, i.e., it is a product of armchair philosophising. It corresponds broadly to two existing party families: right-wing populism and left-wing populism. It must be underscored that this category contains a great variety of parties. It does not constitute a family of parties. Ideological differences between parties in this category are often substantial.

Differences between right-wing populist parties abound, as seen in the endless struggle to form a cohesive bloc in the European
Parliament further to the right of EPP (European People’s Party.) Partly, the difficulties derive from personal conflicts, but primarily they stem from essential differences. After all, these parties trace their history back to as widely different origins as Nazism and Liberalism. Some are radical nationalists, others rely on pure opportunism, while yet others can be found on the slippery slope from xenophobia to blatant racism.

In a similar way, left-wing populism includes parties with roots in Marxism-Leninism, as well as parties stemming from the peace movement of the 1970s; theoretical socialists sit next to representatives of active social movements. European parliaments today hosts orthodox as well as reformed communists, democratic socialists with a radical anti-capitalism and anti-globalisation agenda, and social populists (cf March, 2008).

Nonetheless, despite these tensions and sometimes outright contradictions, the unifying label of authoritarian populism is justified by at least three properties.

1. PEOPLE VS ELITE

Populist parties think of and portray themselves as the true representatives of the people standing up to the elite. Margaret Canovan has made the observation that populist movements on the left as well as on the right take for granted that there actually exists “one people” and that it is excluded from power, “by corrupt politicians and an unrepresentative elite.” This primary trait of populism is rarely found among traditional parties.

An immediate consequence of the claim to represent “the people”, rather than ideas, is that traditional dividing lines and conflicting objectives are erased. Lega Nord’s former chairman, Umberto Bossi, typically described his party as, “libertarian, but also socialist”, while FPO’s Norbert Hofer, a hair’s breadth from becoming the president of Austria in 2016, describes his party as, a “center-right party with a degree of social responsibility.” In Sweden, the right-wing populist party Sverigedemokraterna previously portrayed itself as positioned outside the left-right conflict, which allowed it to cherry-pick conflicting policies from left to right.

2. MAJORITY RULE WITHOUT SPEED-BUMPS

Secondly, authoritarian populism lacks interest in and even patience for constitutional rule of law. Anton Pelinka defines populism as, “… a general protest against the checks and balances introduced to prevent ‘the people’s direct rule’”, and political scientist Tjitske Akkerman concludes that populist parties are, “activists with respect to the law.”

A natural corrective to populists’ lack of trust in the political elite is their general demand for increased direct democracy and specific support to hold more referenda: on EU; on immigration; on minority rights. The Danish People’s Party and Norway’s Progress

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Party both argue that it ought to be possible for citizens to demand a binding referendum on any issue while the Swiss People’s Party has taken advantage of the Swiss constitutional framework to initiate several referendums, on issues such as “mass immigration” and the ban of minarets.

The late chairman of the previously successful Polish populist party Samoobrona, Andrzej Lepper, formulated this view on democracy sententiously: “If the law works against people and generally accepted notions of legality then it isn’t law. The only thing to do is to break it for the sake of the majority”.6

Hence, populists prefer fewer speed bumps in the democratic process in order for temporary majorities to legislate and enforce new laws. Mechanisms to slow down the procedure are regarded as stumbling blocks for the majority. Collectively, the people takes priority over individuals or minority groups. According to Cas Mudde, right-wing populists, as soon they reach power practice the ideal of, “… an extreme form of majoritarian democracy, in which minority rights can exist only as long as they have majority support”.7 This also means that courts shouldn’t be allowed to veto legislation, which explains the oft-seen conflicts between authoritarian populists in power and constitutional courts. In the early 2000s, FPÖ enforced laws at such speed that several of them were repealed by the Supreme Court after the fact and on purely procedural grounds. Also in Hungary and Poland populist governments have rapidly changed or commenced to change the rules of the game. Among the propositions that have been met with especially harsh criticism from the international community is the limitation of the role of the constitutional courts.

In this, at least, right-wing populism overlaps the ideas of nationalism: The nation is the people, thus a majority of the people should rule the nation. Minority rights, then, constitute an obvious threat to this populist view on democracy. As Cas Mudde says: “[…] all populist radical right parties are nationalist, but not all nationalist parties are radical right populist.” Within the emerging left-wing populism, a new phenomenon is making inroads compared to the traditional left. The left used to refer to defined categories as ‘class’, ‘worker’, ‘capitalist’. Segments of the population stood in permanent conflict of interests with other segments of the people (class vs class, workers vs capitalists.) Contemporary left-wing populism, however, has an all-encompassing concept of the people in a way that more resembles today’s right-wing populism than yesteryear’s left.8

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A third similarity is the quest for a more powerful state. Jobbik’s campaign platform maintains that the party strives towards a, “potent, active, and capable state.” This is representative for virtually all parties in the category of authoritarian populism as well as in the categories of left-wing and right-wing extremism. The state is supposed to assume more responsibility, be a general arbiter of various problems and instrumental for social and societal change.

There are of course different views on how to use the power of the state. All parties in this index contest EU and almost all are opponents to NATO. They are through-and-through hostile to globalisation and generally also to free trade. They do, however, often show an affinity for Russia under Putin. Voting patterns in the European Parliament present a quick introduction to the frequency with which left-wing and right-wing populists find common ground despite their ideological differences.

Further, right-wing populists understandably propose additional resources to the police and armed forces. Left-wing populists (but also a considerable number of right-wing populists, like Fidesz and Front National) hold an authoritarian view on the free market and propose socialisation of banks and large corporations. Right-wing populists typically, but not always, advocate a traditional view on family, nation and religion. Left-wing populists in many countries instead argue for stronger rights for sexual and ethnic minorities. The latter, though, is true also for right-wing populists in e.g. the Netherlands.

It should be stressed that authoritarian populism isn’t the only characteristic of parties in the populism category. To the contrary, it is not unusual that populist parties include classical liberal aspects parallel to authoritarian positions. This is true for both right-wing and left-wing parties. Several right-wing populist parties—for instance the Norwegian Progress Party — take a free market position on economic issues. Similarly, many left-wing populist parties represent a liberal view on social issues and partake in organised collaborations with anti-authoritarian socialist or green parties.

Conversely, there exist authoritarian aspects among established parties. It is impossible to draw distinct lines between populist and established parties. Paramount for this study is the role populist attitudes are given within the parties, not the prevalence of these attitudes.

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This report is an effort to present a comprehensive outlook on the growth of populism in European politics and includes all European consolidated democracies: thirty-three countries including the twenty-eight members of EU plus Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, Serbia and Montenegro.

Non-democracies are excluded, since there is no real meaning in comparing countries where democratic rights systematically are being limited or violated to consolidated democracies. The same goes for semi-authoritarian countries with regular, but only somewhat, free elections: Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Moldova. Here, the supply of alternatives to authoritarian populism is too scarce for any meaningful comparison.

The survey begins with 1980, since the overwhelming majority of today’s populist parties emerged during the 1980s and 1990s. Countries are included as soon as they are categorised as a “free” society by Freedom House, an American, governmental-funded NGO. Hence, most post-communist countries enter the survey in 1990, Serbia in 2000 and Croatia in 2001.

Results are included for every party in all elections to national parliaments. Presidential elections, elections to the European Parliament and regional or local elections are excluded.

To make a selection among parties presupposes qualitative judgments with respect to elements that are in constant flux. A further challenge is that parties will often be labelled in stark contrast to their self-image. To state the obvious: very few parties call themselves populist and even fewer brag about their authoritarian streak. It is also, given the scope of the material, not possible to scrutinize each and every party.

Since the aim of the categorisation is to reflect deeply held ideological views of the party, the index relies heavily on secondary sources. To the extent that it has been possible, it follows typical and existing categorizations. Thus, a number of different sources have been used: scholarly literature on the European party system focusing in general on populist parties, as well as particular parties; ideological labels from internet sources such as parties-and-elections.eu and Wikipedia, and the expert study Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES), a quantitative summary of where parties belong on the left-to-right spectrum, combined with additional dimensions that serve to identify right-wing populists (but not left-wing populists) using, for instance, views on minority rights, immigration and multiculturalism.

In general, it is not as difficult to categorize political parties as one might expect. Despite some disagreement on labels, there is a rather wide consensus among scholars on where parties fit in—when in doubt, I have tried to judge the very core of a party’s ideology using both secondary and primary sources (such as official party platforms).

A further difficulty is that many parties are in flux. This is especially true for a number of parties previously described as right-wing extremists, which during the last decade have moved away from extremism. To what degree they have actually succeeded is a question where independent commentators seldom find common ground—Front National and Sverigedemokraterna are typical examples. Austrian FPÖ is included in the study starting 1986, when Jörg Haider was appointed chairman and made anti-immigration a central part of the party platform. Hungarian Fidesz is included from 2002, when the formerly liberal party tipped over into the category of au-
Authoritarian populist parties.

Political parties typically aim at one or more of three general goals: office, vote and influence. Even though these goals are logically compatible – increased voter support leads to influence and a more likely path to political positions – parties often have to prioritize between them. TAP studies to what extent populist parties have succeeded in reaching two of these goals: votes and office. Influence on policy is beyond the scope of this index.

Election results have been used to measure the demand for authoritarian populism. In total, 267 parties with at least 0.1 percent of the votes in any election in any of the thirty-three countries since 1980 are included in each respective category. A European mean value based on the previous election in each country is provided in order to give an easy-to-read overview of year-to-year changes. Thus, the Swedish election of 2014 provides the basis for the Swedish average also in 2015, 2016, and 2017. In other words, the index answers the question of how many voters picked an authoritarian populist party at the turn of the year of the last election. Thus, the result will not depend on whether a certain country had an election in a given year, nor on the number of countries having an election in a given year.

Two different indicators have been used to measure weight. First, the absolute number of seats in the parliament. The index shows how many seats each party has held each year in each respective category. Obviously, this measure includes only those parties that have entered the parliament. Parties such as Front National and United Kingdom Independence Party have had relatively strong performances measured in share of total votes, but as a consequence of the election systems in France and Great Britain this has been only marginally reflected in parliamentary presence. The second indicator to measure weight is the role the party has in parliament. Four categories are used: a party may be part of the government, it may have a formal or informal role as parliamentary support for the government, it may be an opposition party or, finally, it may be an opposition party that is excluded from influence by formal or informal agreement among the other parties (such as the cordon sanitaire in Belgium against Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang or the December Agreement in Sweden against the Sweden Democrats).

In addition to compiling election results and parliament seats (a total of 153 parties have at any time won at least one seat), I have classified parties as “left” or “right”, and “authoritarian” or “extreme.” Left-right depends first and foremost on the classification provided by the parties themselves; when this has been problematic to apply I have used the most prevalent labels in secondary literature; in some especially difficult cases the label has been decided by the party’s choice of partner. These cases, however, have been few enough to not affect the aggregated result.

The division between “authoritarian” or “extreme” depends on the specific view on the concept of democracy. Only explicitly anti-democratic parties have been categorised as anti-democratic. Parties embracing nazism, fascism, communism, trotskyism and maoism have been regarded extreme. Parties classified as authoritarian are anti-liberal, but still democratic.
The popular demand for populism continues to rise. The average voter support was at 22.2 percent in 2018. This is an increase with 1.5 percent in just a year. In addition, this is the second biggest increase on record between two consecutive years. Voter support has grown for ten of the last eleven years.

**FIGURE 1**

Average share of votes for populist parties 1980–2018

During 2018 there have been elections to parliament in six European countries. Populist parties made gains in every single one. The average voter support for populist parties in these countries were 36.2 percent which is an increase of 8.5 percentage points since the last elections four or five years ago.

Italy was the only country of size that held an election in 2018. It turned into a formidable success for populist currents. Beppe Grillo’s Movimento 5 Stelle gained enough to become the biggest party. Lega got seventeen percent, but because of the election system it received more mandates than the governing centre-left party PD. After extensive negotiations a government was at long last formed. It should also be added that a number of small, more radical, populist and extremist parties together gathered 6.5 percent of the vote.
In Sweden, the Sweden Democrats had its best election ever and went from 12.9 percent to 17.5 percent. Thus, SD has increased its support in every election since the formation of the party through eight consecutive elections. There is no other party in Europe, regardless of political affiliation, that has had the same kind of success. After record-long negotiations, a red and green government was formed with parliamentary support from two liberal parties. Swedish politics has been centered around the relationship to SD for a number of years which has, among other things, created a rift within the formerly solid centre-right alliance.

Moreover, the party furthest to the left gained. The Left Party received 8 percent, which is its third best election ever. Isolating the Left Party, as well as SD, was one of the reasons the liberal parties referred to as grounds for allowing a new red and green government. The Left Party has, however, previously supported the Social Democrats without being granted any cabinet positions.

In Hungary, Fidesz was re-elected for the second time. Fidesz began its second period of government in 2010, after having reached a majority of the vote. The party won re-election in 2014, although it lost seven percent of the vote. In the election of 2018, it once again increased its vote, this time with just over four percentage points to 49.3 percent, which was enough to warrant a majority of the seats in parliament. Right-wing extremists Jobbik continued to defend its position as the second largest party with its 19.1 percent, which was a modest loss compared to 2014. Hungary is the country in Europe where authoritarian populism has made its greatest inroads. In its ranking for 2018, Freedom House chose to lower its rank for Hungary to the point where it is no longer counted among the free nations, but rather a semi-free nation. This is the first time an EU member state is classified as such.

The Latvian elections in October saw a brand new party, KPV (“Who owns the state?”), ending up as the second largest party. KPV started out with an anti-corruption agenda, but soon assumed a familiar, general, populist stance, “[...] portraying the existing political elite as venal, elitist and interested only in staying in power while keeping the
vast majority of the population in poverty and desperation.”

Its PM candidate Gobzems emanated “[…] the rhetorics employed by Donald Trump in his election campaign,” and publicly threatened to “personally fire” journalists from public service. KPV won 14 percent. After several rounds of negotiations, it took part in a five-party coalition.

The existing right-wing populist party in the Latvian parliament, the nationalist National Alliance (NA) lost more than five percentage points, and ended up as the fifth biggest party with eleven percent of the votes. It continues, however, to be part of the coalition government.

Slovenia, just like Lithuania, has a highly volatile party system. National conservative and populist SDS increased its voter support to 24 percent, and became the largest party. However, it remains in opposition.

Luxembourg is among the countries where populist parties have had difficulties to grow. In the election of last fall, right-wing populist ADR gained less than two percentage points and won 8.3 percent of the vote – the best result for the party since 2000. It should be noted, though, that there is no consensus as to whether ADR should be categorised as a populist party.

FIGURE 3
Percent of votes for populist parties 2008 and 2018

The variation among countries is large. In three countries populist parties amass more than half of the vote: Hungary, Greece, and Italy; in four countries the share is higher than thirty percent. In four countries – Romania, Ireland, United Kingdom, and Malta – populist parties attract less than five percent. During the last decade, support for populism has grown across all of Europe. In half of the countries the support is more than three percentage points higher than in 2008. Only six countries have seen a decline of a similar scale.

Fascist parties were highly discredited after the Second World War and with a few exceptions they have continued a dwindling existence in the fringes of parliamentarism. But the distaste for authoritarian politics went deep and hindered the emergence of populism. When Ernest Gellner and Ghita Ionescu observed the world in 1969, in one of the first scientific studies on contemporary populism, they saw that it was on the rise everywhere, except in democratic Western Europe. The success in the 1970s of right-wing parties of discontent in countries such as Denmark and Norway had only a marginal effect on the overall picture: right-wing authoritarian politics had been defeated once and for all in 1945.

At the beginning of the 1980s, right-wing authoritarian parties were thus a marginal phenomenon. Only one European voter in a hundred voted for a fascist or right-wing populist party.

The rise of the right-wing authoritarian parties is well known and frequently reported. During the first half of the 1980s these parties only got a few scattered votes here and there. The first real breakthrough came in 1986, when Front National won 9.9 per cent of the votes in the French parliamentary election. In the same year Jörg Haider assumed leadership of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) which as a result became critical of immigration and secured 16.6 per cent of the votes in the 1990 parliamentary election.

With the democratization in Eastern Europe came a number of successes for radical nationalist parties: The Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Romania were among the countries that had right wing extremists in their parliaments early on with voter support between five and ten per cent. At the same time Vlaams Blok had its breakthrough in Belgium (6.6 per cent in the 1991 election) and the right-wing populist party Ny Demokrati entered the Swedish parliament.

While many of the Eastern European parties regressed or in some cases died out entirely, the majority of the parties in Western Europe have remained. Even though there is disagreement as to labels and demarcations between them there is no doubt that there is a family of right-wing populist parties today. Even countries long thought to be particularly difficult cases for right-wing authoritarian parties – Sweden, Germany, the United Kingdom – have witnessed their rise to prominence in the 2010s.

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During the first few years of the 2010s, it looked like right-wing populist parties had reached stagnation, but since 2014 they have grown dramatically. In just four years, their support has gone from 11.6 percent in 2014 to 15.4 percent in 2018. This represents the fastest growth period ever for these parties. Of course, these numbers depend on their simultaneous success in a number of countries. Support is strongest in Hungary, Poland and Switzerland. Ireland is the only country where there is no right-wing populist party. Spain was for a long time the only big country without right-wing populism, but during the fall of 2018 Vox, which only gathered 0.2 percent in the last election, has grown considerably in the polls.

Communist parties reaped some success during the first years after the war. In Czechoslovakia the communists won in a fairly free election in 1946. At the end of the 1940s one fourth of Finnish voters voted for the communist party, in Norway and Belgium about half that number. Even in countries such as Greece, Italy and France there was great support for Moscow-loyal communist parties.

However, already during the 1950s support began to dwindle. The strong ties with the Soviet Union were increasingly considered a burden. The parties founded towards the end of the 1960s, which had China as an inspiration and Maoism as ideology attracted many intellectuals, but almost no voters. In total, social democracy came out stronger at the other end of this wave of left-wing radicalism; in Sweden the Social Democrats won over 50 per cent of the votes in the 1968 general election.

At the beginning of the 1980s less than ten per cent voted for left-wing authoritarian parties. By then many of the Western communist parties had moved away from plans of a one party state and centrally planned economy. In Italy the communist party opened up for democracy already in the 1970s and worked together with the Christian democrats. In Sweden the loyalty to the East remained by means of congratulatory telegrams and festivities, but in the actual domestic politics the
The communist party was an integrated and mainly democratic party during the 1980s. When the 1980s became the 1990s both the voters and the parties had left communism behind. The support for left-wing authoritarian parties levelled out during the first half of the 1990s but then continued to drop and reached its lowest point, 3.7 per cent, in 2006. Only in a handful of Southern and Central European countries did the left-wing authoritarian parties attract any significant number of voters.

**FIGURE 5**
The comeback of the radical left

The financial crisis meant a turn for radical left-wing parties. Between 2009 and 2014, the support almost doubled. The increase was driven mainly by the exceptional successes for left-wing populist parties in Greece, Italy and Spain, but left-wing radicals have also been successful in countries such as Denmark, Belgium, Ireland, Romania and Croatia. After 2015, however, their upward trajectory has flattened. It seems that voter support has consolidated around seven percent. It should be noted, however, that the average is raised by results in a small number of countries. The median increase value is only 1.3 percent. In fourteen of the countries, the radical left attracts less than one percent of the vote.

The support is strongest along the Mediterranean Sea and the six top countries all lie in or extend to Southern Europe: Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, Spain and France.
All parties in this study are radical. Their goal is a major, political change of direction. Only a minority of the parties, however, are extremist. The difference concerns their view on the democratic system as such. Radical parties from left to right want to achieve a rapid and broad change within the existing system. Extremist parties reject the legitimacy of the system and use it only for tactical reasons.

This distinction can be difficult to uphold in real life, but from an analytical and political perspective it is crucial. Politically it is fundamental for how to contest these parties. Extreme, anti-democratic parties are threats to the system, and must in some cases be stopped with extraordinary measures. Radical, but democratic, parties must be treated in the same way as any other political party.

**FIGURE 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Democratic</th>
<th>Anti-democratic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Anti-corruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-liberal</td>
<td>Authoritarian populism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The upper, left corner represent a small number of parties, mainly stemming from Eastern Europe. They are adamantly anti-establishment, use unforgiving rhetoric, but still do not in essence depart from liberal principles. Hence, they are not included in this study. It is true that they are populist, but since “the European consensus” often is represented by the anti-establishment parties rather than the more or less corrupt elites, it would be erroneous to include them in an index where the primary purpose is to map a threat to liberal democracy.

The upper right corner is empty. Libertarian or anarcho-liberal groups that reject democracy belong here, but such factions scarcely form political parties.

In the lower right corner we find parties that are both anti-liberal and anti-democratic. Historically, this category includes the successful challengers against Western democracies during the Cold War era, i.e. communism and fascism. Today, it is primarily represented by right-wing extremists combining ethnic nationalism with populism—Hungarian Jobbik is a prototypical example—but it also includes remnants of left-wing extremists (Trotskyism, Leninism) that dismiss the entire political elite and claim to stand for the people.

Authoritarian populist parties, as stated earlier, are pro-democracy but anti-liberal.

Twenty-five parties in the index have won at least ten percent in their last election. Out of these “Big 25” only one – Jobbik in Hungary – can be classified as extremist. The rest are rather to be classified as typical authoritarian populists. It’s worth noting that, despite the dominance of right-wing populists, some of the most successful parties are left-wing populists.
## FIGURE 7

"BIG 25"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Full party name</th>
<th>Last election</th>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Ideology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HUN</td>
<td>FIDESZ</td>
<td>Fidesz - Magyar Polgári Szövetség</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>right-wing populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POL</td>
<td>PIS</td>
<td>Prawo i Sprawiedliwość</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>right-wing populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRE</td>
<td>Syriza</td>
<td>Synapismos Rizospastikis Aristeras</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>left-wing populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITA</td>
<td>M5S</td>
<td>Movimento Cinque Stelle</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>left-wing populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWI</td>
<td>SVP</td>
<td>Schweizerische Volkspartei</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>right-wing populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUT</td>
<td>FPÖ</td>
<td>Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>right-wing populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CYP</td>
<td>AKEL</td>
<td>Anorthotiko Komma Ergazomenou Laou</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>left-wing populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLN</td>
<td>SDS</td>
<td>Slovenska demokratska stranka</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>right-wing populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESP</td>
<td>Podemos</td>
<td>Podemos</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>left-wing populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEN</td>
<td>DF</td>
<td>Dansk Folkeparti</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>right-wing populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNE</td>
<td>NSD</td>
<td>Nova srpska demokratija</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>right-wing populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUN</td>
<td>JOBBIK</td>
<td>Jobbik Magyarországtét Mozgalom</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>right-wing populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIN</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Sannfinländarna</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>right-wing populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWE</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Sverigedemokraterna</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>right-wing populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITA</td>
<td>LN</td>
<td>Lega (Lega Nord)</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>right-wing populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOR</td>
<td>FrP</td>
<td>Fremskrittspartiet</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>right-wing populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAT</td>
<td>KPV LV</td>
<td>Kam pieder valsts?</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>right-wing populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRA</td>
<td>FN</td>
<td>Front National</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>right-wing populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NET</td>
<td>PVV</td>
<td>Partij voor de Wijheid</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>right-wing populism</td>
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<tr>
<td>GER</td>
<td>AFD</td>
<td>Alternative für Deutschland</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>right-wing populism</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAT</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Nacionala apvieniba Visu Latvijai! - Tevze,ei un Brivibai/LNNK</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>right-wing populism</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRA</td>
<td>FI</td>
<td>Le France Insoumise</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>left-wing populism</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICE</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Miðflokaurinn</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>right-wing populism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CZE</td>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>Svoboda a Primá Demokracie</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>right-wing populism</td>
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<tr>
<td>POR</td>
<td>BE</td>
<td>Bloco de Esquerda</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>left-wing populism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are a total of 7,843 seats in the national parliaments of the 33 countries included in this study. Out of these, 1,768 have been categorised as populist and pro-democracy, while 173 have been categorized as anti-democracy (“left-wing” or “right-wing” extremists). This equals 22.5 and 2.2 percent respectively, which means that roughly a quarter of all parliamentary seats today is held by representatives of non-liberal and/or anti-democratic parties.

**FIGURE 8**

Seats in national parliaments

Obviously, these members of parliaments from authoritarian or extremist parties wield political power through their very presence. They influence the outcome of decisions when they cast their votes; they occupy platforms from which they can communicate their message.

For some, this is where it ends. Many of the most radical parties are still isolated in their parliaments: other parties refuse to collaborate with them; informal mechanisms develop in order to limit their influence; they are met with active resistance from the establishment.

The majority of these parties, however, function as regular, parliamentary party caucuses. They negotiate with other parties; they form more or less far-reaching and more or less long-lasting alliances. About a dozen are included in or positioned very close to the executive power.

At the time of this report, there are authoritarian parties in government in eleven European countries: Hungary, Poland, Greece, Norway, Finland, Latvia, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Switzerland, Austria and Italy.
What used to be an aberration has become a state of normalcy. During the 1980s, authoritarian parties were only occasionally included in governments. In 2018, authoritarian populists wielded power in one-third of Europe’s governments. This is an exceptional development over a short timespan.
In May, the members of the European Parliament will be directly elected by voters for the ninth time. The parliament that was inaugurated already in 1958 (but given the name European Parliament in 1962) was initially thought of as an advisory institution. During the 1970s, when its influence in the EEC’s budget grew, the idea to also elect its members by a general ballot emerged. The first elections were held in 1979, and during the subsequent decades the parliament’s influence has gradually increased. According to the Lisbon Treaty from 2009, the European Parliament formally has equal power to the European Council and full influence on the EU’s budget.

The European Parliament was ideologically divided already from the beginning. In Strasbourg and Brussels, members are grouped according to party affiliation, not nationality. The entire parliamentary activity is strongly influenced by party groups, and the vote according to party affiliation is quite consistent, especially among the more established groups.

One trait that separates the European Parliament from national parliaments is that parties come and go to a much larger extent, and that new party groups regularly are formed or reformed. This means that party politics on the EU level can often be very difficult to grasp. In addition, it is not always obvious to voters to which group a certain party belongs, or with which parties from other nations they work with.

Next to the large groups in the parliament – Social Democrats, conservatives, liberals, and Green – there have always been alternatives at the ends of the scale. Since 1979, there has been a group left of the Social Democrats that has gathered the radical left. Already in 1972 COM was formed (for communists and their allies), consisting of French and Italian communists. This group won 44 mandates in 1979 and 41 mandates in 1984. After the election of 1989, the group was dissolved. The so-called euro-communists from Spain, Italy, and Greece formed their own group under the name GUE (The Group for the United European Left) while the still Moscow loyal communists from France, Greece, and Portugal formed CG (The Unity Left). In 1994, the far left once again united in GUE, which in 1995, after the EU was extended to Sweden and Finland, was reformed into GUE/NGL, where the latter stands for Nordic Green Left. NGL contained the Swedish and the Finnish Left Party, as well as Danish Socialist People’s Party.

This group has continued to exist under the same name up till this day. It is a comparably loosely connected group – since 1994 the group’s name indicates that it is confederal, i.e., the power resides with the national parties – with strong tensions between the parties that have opted for a reformistic and democratic strategy, and those which still adhere to communism and advocates revolution. Partly as a consequence of this, both the Finnish left and the Socialist People’s Party have moved to the Green group of the European parliament while the Swedish Left Party remains as well as the Danish Unity List. During the last term, the Greek communist party left the group with the motivation that GUE/NGL is too revisionist.

Despite its obvious dissimilarities, and despite the fact that this group is more loosely connected than other groups, it is still striking how the radical left in European politics for a long time has been effectively united. Democratic socialists have successfully absorbed the more radical minority, and for all practical purposes there is no left-leaning association in the European parliament that is too radical to not be accepted by GUE-NGL. In addi-
tion, tensions on the fringes are seldom given much attention and the democratic social-
ist parties cooperation with its more radical group members seldom reaches the headlines.

**FIGURE 10**

Share of mandates in the European parliament for respective party group in percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>COM</th>
<th>CG</th>
<th>GUE</th>
<th>GUE-NGL</th>
<th>DR</th>
<th>UEN</th>
<th>EN</th>
<th>I/EN</th>
<th>EDD</th>
<th>EFD</th>
<th>EFDD</th>
<th>ECR</th>
<th>ENF (from 2015)</th>
<th>S, PES, SD</th>
<th>EPP</th>
<th>EPPE-D</th>
<th>ITS</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1979</td>
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</table>

**COM** = communists and allies, 1979–89;  
**CG** = United Left, 1989–94;  
**GUE** = Group for the united European left, 1989–94; Confederal group for the united European left 1994–95;  
**GUE-NGL** = Confederal group for the united European left/Nordic green left, 1995–;  
**DR** = European right, 1984–94;  
**UEN** = Union for European Nations, 1999–2009;  
**EFD** = Europe for freedom and democracy, 2009–14;  
**EFDD** = Europe for freedom and direct democracy, 2014.

As reference points are included also the two largest groups: the Socialist group, 1979–93, and PES, European socialist group, 1993–2009;  
**ENF** = Europe of Nations and Freedom, 2015–;  
**S&D** = Progressive union of socialists and democrats in the European parliament, 2009–;  
**EPP** = European People’s Party, 1979–1999, 2009–;  

The radical right has had more difficulties to unite. Right-wing populists or right-wing extremists didn’t win any mandates 1979 to the first parliament. It took until 1984 before the nationalistic parties got their European breakthrough. French Front National, formed already in 1972, but still without representation in the French National Assembly, managed to win eleven percent in its first major leap forward, which gave them ten mandates in the European Parliament. Together with the Italian neo-fascist party MSI and one single Greek fascist, Jean-Marie Le Pen could form the first right-wing extremist group in the European Parliament: the Group for the European Right (DR). It survived two terms. After the success in the French elections to parliament in 1986, Front National three years later repeated its result from 1984 and won ten mandates to the European Parliament. However, instead of working together with Italian and Greek fascists, Le Pen now had to join forces with Germans and Flemings. The German right-wing extremist Republican Party won six mandates, while Flemish Vlaams Blok (VB) got one single mandate (this was two years before VB got its national breakthrough in Belgium). When Le Pen consequently began to cooperate with the Republicans, the Italian fascists opted to leave and rather operate outside of any group until 1994.
In retrospect, there were no real results in the wake of DR’s years in the parliament. It was an explicitly ‘technical’ collaboration without ambitions to develop a joint agenda. The group was rather a platform for Jean-Marie Le Pen (member of the European parliament since 1984), since he, as a consequence of the election system for the French parliament, didn’t have a national platform in France, except for the years 1986-1988. After the election in 1994, DR was dissolved never to reemerge. The right-wing extremist parties that were elected in 1994 – Front National, MSI, and VB – hence remained without group affiliation. Despite the growing success among voters through the entire decade for nationalist, right-wing populist and extremist parties, both on a European level and nationally, it would take some time before Le Pen made a new effort towards a reunion.

In the election of 1999, Front National made a poor showing and received only five mandates. However, two new party groups were formed with elements of nationalism, populism, and xenophobia. First, there was AEN, the Union for Europe of the Nations. It consisted of a motley crew of parties: Irish Fienna Fail, Danish People’s Party, and Alleanza Nationale (AN), the successor of MSI, which under the leadership of Gianfranco Fini joined up with the conservative elements of the fractured Christian Democratic Party, which in turn was badly damaged after corruption scandals. This marked the beginning of a journey from neo-fascism towards social conservatism.

The second group that was formed was Europe of Democracies and Diversities (EDD), an essentially Euro-sceptic faction where United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and Denmark’s June List joined up with among others French Euro-sceptics and evangelicals from the Netherlands. Even though UKIP was no stranger to xenophobic rhetoric, the parties of this group were brought together mainly by its resistance to the EU in itself.

The 2004 election was a success for Euro-sceptic parties and made possible for these two groups to live on. EDD, however, was renamed as Independence/Democracy (ID), and was joined by Sweden’s June List together with Italian Lega Nord and ultra-conservative Polish Family Association. Soon conflicts emerged within this group, which lead to both defections and exclusions. After only a few years both the Polish and the Italians had left the group, as well as several British members. Meanwhile, the Danish People’s Party remained in the UEN together with, among others, the national conservative Lithuanian party Fatherland and Freedom. The really radical nationalist parties were still without any group affiliation. The reason was mainly that the number of members and the number of countries were too few for a right-wing extremist group to come into existence. When the EU was extended in 2007 to include Romania and Bulgaria, and the parliament thus received new members – five of which were ultra-nationalists from Greater Romania Party (PRM), and three from Bulgarian Ataka – Le Pen, still the leader of Front National, became hopeful that a new start was within reach. Thus, in January 2007, the group Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty (ITS) was formed, consisting of seven members from Front National plus representatives of PRM, Ataka, Belgian Vlaams Belang (VB, successor of Vlaams Blok), Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), and a few members from Italy, including Benito Mussolini’s granddaughter, Allessandra Mussolini. She was to become the downfall of the entire group. After a murder in Italy that received massive media coverage, where an immigrant from Romania was the suspect, Mussolini commented that breaking the law had become “a Romanian life-style […] Not, however, petty crimes, but horrendous crimes that send a chill up your spine.”
Her words led the Romanian ultra-nationalists to demand that Mussolini left the group, and when this didn’t happen, they themselves left, which meant that the group now had too few members to even exist. Thus, less than a year after its formation, the second attempt to form a radical right-wing extremist group within the European parliament failed. ITS never had time to exert any influence, not the least because its participation in the parliament’s committees was effectively blocked – maybe not entirely in line with rules and regulations – by the other party groups. After the 2009 election, the playing field changed slightly. Fienna Fail entered the liberal group while Italian AN applied for membership in EPP. At the same time the Lithuanian nationalists joined British Tories within the newly started, Euro-sceptic group European Conservatists and Reformists (ECR).

The ID-group was also dissolved. Too many left the group, and when UKIP was the only member party to have a good election result it had too few members to go on. Out of the rubble of these two groups a new one rose: Freedom and Democracy in Europe (EFD). The leading parties of this group were Italian Lega Nord and British UKIP. The Danish People’s Party also joined, as did the True Finns from Finland, nationalist party SNS from Slovakia, conservative party Order and Justice from Lithuania and the Greek nationalist party LAOS.

The members of this group had in common their strong aversion to the EU-project, but neither the group nor any of its parties proposed to leave the EU. The EPD group has also been watchful against being associated with right-wing extremists. One example of this is how the party majority several times has rejected the application for membership from Austrian FPÖ.

In 2009, Front National had its worst election ever to the European parliament, and received only a modest three mandates – and a further five years in the shade. Hence, leading up to the election of 2014 the party mobilised all its forces. In November 2013, Geert Wilders, party leader of the Netherlands’ Freedom Party (PVV), and Marine Le Pen, party leader of French Front National, held a joint news conference in The Hague, where they divulged that they had agreed to cooperate to, as they put it, “start of the liberation of Europe from the monster of Brussels.”

The campaign of 2014 came to center largely at mobilising against such nationalism. The fear of a huge nationalist breakthrough was palpable, and this was exactly what happened. In Denmark, France, the United Kingdom and Greece, populist parties became their country’s biggest party.

It wasn’t until one year after the election in June 2015 that Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders were able to realize their project. Together with members from FPÖ, Lega, VB, Polish KPN, and a defected member from UKIP, Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) was formed, and became the smallest parliamentary group. Since, EFN has added a small number of members, but remains a relatively inconsequential group in the parliament.

Also EFD had difficulties surviving the election. The Danish People’s Party and the True Finn’s Party were invited to join the ECR group. At long last UKIP managed to, with the tiniest margin possible, gather enough members to survive. The decisive factor was that the Italian Five Star Movement was denied membership both by the Green group and by ALDE, and hence instead opted for joining UKIP. In connection with this the group changed its name to Europe for Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD). During the term EPDD has seen an unusual amount of turmoil with a large number of defectors.

Instead the conservative group ECR became the big winner in the election of 2014. It was partly because of its success for its cur-
rent members, and partly due to new parties joining post-election. In the spring of 2018, also the Swedish Democrats joined, thereby making ECR the home for all the Scandinavian right-wing populist parties.

Five of the existing party groups in the European Parliament today contains parties which have been classified as authoritarian in this report. Only the Social Democratic, Green and Liberal groups lack representation from populists.

ENF consists exclusively of authoritarian, right-wing populists.

EFDD consists almost exclusively of populists, but among its members we also find one MP from the British Social Democratic Party.

ECR is dominated by authoritarian populists, but also contains prominent, established, conservative parties, for instance, British Tories, Czech ODS, as well as smaller, non-populist though Euro-sceptic parties as Slovakia’s O’La’no, Netherland’s CU, and Belgian New Flemish Alliance.

In EPP we still find Hungarian Fidesz in spite of constantly ongoing debates as to whether it should be allowed to belong. In addition, EPP contains Slovenian SDS, the classification of which as a right-wing populist party remains under debate.

GUE-NGL is dominated by left-wing populists, but also includes left-wing extremist parties, such as the communist parties of Portugal and Czechia. It also includes some small, non-populist niche-parties, e.g. the Dutch Party for Animal Rights and the Danish People’s Movement Against the EU.

The main question concerning the May 2019 election doesn’t primarily involve the share of voters that these parties will amass, but rather to what extent they will be able to influence policy within EU institutions.

At the far left, the relative harmony within GUE-NGL will most likely continue. During the last decades these parties have converged, and increasingly found common ground. In addition, there is a long-standing tradition within the radical left of the European parliament to join forces, rather than to regress to in-fighting – the main exception being the conflicts of 1989-94.

The populist right looks once again ready for a reformation. Few groups have survived more than one term. Only since the 2014 elections almost a full third of the right-wing populist members have either left their parties for another, started a new party, or continued as non-inscrits.12

At the moment, the main question is whether going forward there will remain as many as three different groups to the right of the EPP, or if old antagonists will unite and create a larger community. Obviously, an immediate consequence of Brexit is that both the ECR and the EPDD will lose its main national party.

Potentially, a right-wing populist group could emerge as the third biggest party group of the parliament. A prerequisite will be whether its parties will manage to reconcile themselves with each other’s affiliations and history, instead of defining themselves – at least in their communication towards domestic followers – by what they are against, rather than by their own agendas.

Since the end of the World War II, liberal democratic parties have won overwhelming majorities in practically all elections in Europe. Liberal democracy has become a super-ideology, uniting parties with roots in socialism, conservatism and liberalism, Christian democratic parties as well as green parties. The lowest point for the challengers of liberal democracy was reached in 1987, when only 9.5 per cent of European voters opted for a totalitarian or authoritarian left-wing or right-wing alternative. Contrary to contemporary wisdom, Francis Fukuyama was without doubt right in the summer of 1989 to claim that liberal democracy was on its way to become the only game in town. Before the Berlin Wall fell down, the support for anti-democratic systems had withered away all over the West.

The authoritarian populism that is gaining strength in Europe today should not be equated with either fascism or communism. It is fundamentally democratic in the sense that its legitimacy rests on the idea of a popular majority. There is no need for an avant garde. There is no need for a theory of false consciousness. Instead, it is the actual knowledge of genuine popular dissatisfaction with elites, immigration and supranationalism that fuels the populist engine.

But at the same time, it is also fundamentally anti-liberal and thus authoritarian. It views liberal parties as the main opponents. It seeks to castrate liberal institutions from the inside. It is nurtured by a conflict of ideas - the culture wars - where it is consistently aimed against liberalism. At the same time, populism is in essence compatible with large parts of both the social democratic and conservative idea complex. Equality, justice, people, nation, safety, stability, welfare - traditional concepts of the right and the left are reloaded in the hands of self-confident populists.

This is all the more intriguing since the long-term trend clearly indicates that authoritarian populism gains at the expense of social
democracy and conservatism.

In 1998, conservatism and social democracy was still the two most important ideologies in European party politics, together collecting about 60 percent of the voters. Liberalism was a far-distant third, with 10 percent of the voters supporting parties with liberalism as its main ideology.

Twenty years later, authoritarian populism has grown to twice the size of liberalism and almost equals social democracy. Exclude the countries of southeast Europe - where social democracy in reality is very similar to a social populism represented by left and right-wing populists in the rest of Europe - and authoritarian populism is already the second biggest ideology in Europe. Of course, it should be made clear that this concept refers to two separate party families. But the overlap in terms of ideology, worldview as well as policy should not be underestimated. The width of the populists are not necessarily larger than that between north European liberal conservatives and social conservatives in the south, or between Social democrats in Western and Eastern Europe.