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CONSERVATISM

What Does the New Right Believe?

From trade to migration to personal freedom, the conservatives of the global New Right hold a philosophy incompatible with individualism.

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In every country where the New Right has become a significant force, its foundational issue has been a "thick" notion of national identity. A nation, its partisans argue, is a body of people with a shared transgenerational attachment to a specific territory, a shared language, a shared history, way of life, set of customs, and so on. Which features are considered essential varies, but the worldview is clearly distinct from civic nationalism, which defines a nation as the people living under a common law and system of government in a particular place at a given time.

This thick idea of a people can be exclusionary (in which case it is difficult or impossible for outsiders to be adopted into the nation) or more open to integrating new members over time. What it is not compatible with is radical pluralism or individualism.

The second core idea is the belief that the continued existence of the nation is under existential threat. The threat most often cited is large-scale migration, as in the "Great Replacement" theory. Others include economic globalism, the contemporary media system, and modern technology more generally. The opposition here is not so much to other cultures (with the exception for some of Islam) but to the way modern economic forces and technology move large numbers of people around the world and merge them in large city regions while simultaneously creating a kind of global "interface" or "airport lounge" monoculture. The perceived threat provokes political action, while the imminence and severity (often understood in apocalyptic terms) justify making this the most important and salient political question.

The New Right understands the nation-state as the institutional embodiment of a self-governing people or nation. In a democratic system, that means a commitment to popular sovereignty and majoritarian democracy, as these are the means by which the nation governs itself. That in turn means opposition to two trends that have become ever more prominent

since 1945 and particularly since 1989. The first is handing over national sovereignty to supranational bodies, whether through pooling arrangements such as the European Union or by binding international treaties. The second is the practice of constraining political decision making by making it subordinate not only to international laws but to domestic ones, and subjecting those decisions to judicial oversight.

In economics, efficiency and maximizing growth, while important, are subordinate to collective national goals. There is also an emphasis on production rather than consumption as the main goal of policy.

This national political economy is not socialist or egalitarian but also not a free market. The best label for it is national collectivism or neomercantilism. This means support for protectionism and for a national industrial policy in which governments direct investment. It also means opposition to the trade agreements—regulatory harmonization deals that took a great deal of regulatory discretion away from national governments—that were popular after 1990, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement. There is a particular emphasis on manufacturing and farming, as opposed to globally traded services. There is skepticism or outright hostility toward finance.

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Two things should be noted here. Firstly, this vision is not compatible with the form capitalism has taken since the 1970s and the kind of international rule-governed order created since then. Nor is it compatible with the classical liberal ideal of a global market and trading system in which individuals and companies trade with each other in a way that makes national borders as irrelevant as possible. Both of those require global rules, however generated, and a removal of economic decisions from national governments in the case of actually existing global capitalism, and from politics altogether in the second case.

Secondly, the project of a national political economy is now much more difficult for European countries to practice than is the case for very large and populous countries such as China, Brazil, India, or the United States. At their current level of development, they are not large enough to follow the neomercantilist model without a major reduction in living standards. This explains why parties like the National Rally (R.N.), which once favoured "Frexit" or at least France leaving the euro, have pulled back from that position. This is one reason for the slow appearance in Europe's New Right politics of a civilizational nationalism that treats individual countries as parts of a larger European nation.

The most obvious political position that follows from the emphasis on national identity and self-government is the one at the center of the New Right's day-to-day politics: opposition to large-scale migration. The main objection to immigration is not that the immigrants have

values or ways of life that are at odds with those of the indigenous population. Those arguments are made, of course, but they are secondary to the main one, which is that the process makes the population with a shared descent and ancestry a minority.

A related political question is opposition to multiculturalism and to pluralism more generally. Pluralism within the national community is accepted, but pluralism of different nations and cultures living together is not, unless the host one is clearly superior and dominant. A complicating factor is that those who support easy migration and multiculturalism are seen as traitors to the national identity, and so there are limits to the degree of internal pluralism. Economic arguments about the costs and benefits of immigration are also made, but, while important, these again are not central. Economic considerations are subordinate to ones of identity.

Another feature of this nationalism is strong support for the existing welfare state and its programs, but as citizenship goods that should only be available to national citizens (in the restrictive definition they wish to apply). This is not simply a matter of electoral expediency, although that is undoubtedly a calculation. As New Right parties move away from free market positions, they come to the sincere belief that a welfare system is one of the functions of the national community.

Until recently, the New Right tended to oppose the neoconservative foreign policy of the United States. More generally, New Right parties were opposed to the neoconservative--inspired policy of spreading Western liberal democratic practices. There was particular opposition to what the older President George Bush described as a "New World Order." This was all seen as both hubristic and antithetical to the idea of a world of independent sovereign nations.

Consequently, most espoused the "realist" view of international relations, while their opposition to the orientation of U.S. and NATO policy often meant sympathy for some of its opponents, most notably Russia. One area where there is support for U.S. policy is with regard to Israel, with most taking a clear pro-Israel posture—partly because of their strong anti-Islam position.

This once-shared outlook has been disrupted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Many parties—including ones that had previously shown strong Russian sympathies, such as the R.N. in France—turned against Russia. This was particularly marked in Poland, the Baltic states, and Scandinavia, for obvious historical and geopolitical reasons. But there are exceptions. In Germany and Hungary, the original position has if anything been reinforced. In several countries, such as Sweden, the more radical parties have reaffirmed a pro-Russian, anti-NATO position while the larger and more successful ones have disowned it.

Despite these differences, these parties all reject the idea that history has an arc leading to a single world society. Instead, there is sympathy for the notion of a multipolar world of several great powers or blocs.

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Another feature of this New Right is a type of cultural politics that is often labelled as conservative but is again more explicitly nationalist. In this view, culture has been politicized by the left, or alternatively by the globalist establishment. The goal of cultural policy, therefore, becomes the continuity of the historical culture of the national community.

This can involve social conservatism, but not always. In the Netherlands and the U.K., social liberalism is part of the national identity that Geert Wilders and Nigel Farage see themselves as conserving and defending. What *is* a universal feature of New Right politics is anti-wokeness, which is not the same as social conservatism. It is opposition to the identity politics now strongly associated with the left. Since the New Right is putting forward its own identity politics as an alternative, both the New Right and the woke left are at odds with classical liberal individualism and also with traditional class-based left-wing politics.

In the New Right version of identity politics, there are "real" or "natural" identities that are derived from things that cannot be chosen. These include such things as the place of one's birth, the parents and siblings you have, the people you grow up among, the language you speak, and in many places your religion, but also your genetic inheritance, your physical sex, your biological nature as an embodied being. This is a prescriptive and determined identity, not a chosen one.

Related to this but distinct is a concern for the household and a feeling that current policy, cultural forms, and economic life all work to undermine it. The family is important in the nationalist right because it is the main channel by which the ideas, beliefs, practices, and narratives of national identity are passed on. One feature of this is a valorization of traditional gender roles. Another is a concern about the birth rate and support for pronatalist policies.

Another major feature of this new politics is a damning view of many people who work in the machinery of government (or closely with the government, in advisory bodies, nongovernmental organizations, and so on). This extended public apparatus, with the mainstream media portrayed as its propaganda arm, is seen as a self-interested class with its own agenda. The emergent policy demand is a radical reconstruction of government so as to make these bodies subordinate to popular majorities. In the U.S., the Department of Government Efficiency was sold as being about reducing government spending, but that was camouflage, given that the overwhelmingly dominant constituents of U.S. federal spending (debt interest, defense, Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security) were not touched. The real aim was to cripple the infrastructure of agencies and the nongovernmental organizations they fund, so as to break the power of the enemy class.

The enemy class is the professional-managerial class—people who administer large and complex organizations. Access to this class depends upon academic attainment: They are graduates. This explains why it is not the wealthy, business, or public-sector employees in general who are the object of ire. Entrepreneurs such as Elon Musk are admired, but there is hostility toward highly paid professionals such as senior managers or lawyers. Most kinds of business are respected, but there is deep hostility to specific sectors, notably finance, insurance, real estate, and private equity. There is a specific aversion to the media and to tech. Public sector workers who carry out physical or manual tasks are respected, but there can be animosity toward teachers and white-collar public sector workers.

From the U.S. to France to Turkey, there is a distinctive electoral pattern of support for New Right politics. Everywhere, the geographical division of votes pits rural areas and small towns and former industrial areas against globally connected metropolitan areas, with suburbs and exurbs the battleground. (The other great stronghold of the anti–New Right side is university towns and their hinterland.) The more globally connected an area is and the more its economy depends on globally traded services, the less likely it is to support populist nationalism. Support for the insurgent right includes both less-well-off and better-off income groups, with support among lower-income groups rising.

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What will be the new nationalism's chief opponent? The New Right now has an insurgent populist quality as it reacts against the current consensus. That makes defense of the technocratic neoliberal order the main present interlocutor. But this system of governance is clearly breaking down.

Perhaps radical left globalists will become the main competitor. This is a clear possibility in France, Spain, and Greece, and it is an outside possibility elsewhere. Movements of this kind share many of the national collectivists' critiques of the established order, but their alternative is cosmopolitan rather than nationalist. They descend from the left-wing anti-globalization movements of the late 1990s and early 2000s, just as the collectivist New Right is successor to the right-wing anti-globalists of that era.

This kind of politics has two main obstacles to overcome. The first is that their cultural radicalism alienates many who would otherwise be supportive, particularly younger men. The other challenge is more fundamental. They support global integration of a different kind, one that (in their view) is not run in the interests of a globalized capitalist class. But they do not yet have a model for that supranational system of governance. They look to the state to check capitalism, and the only state on offer with sufficient legitimacy is the national one.

Other kinds of political formations could be minor players but are not likely to become the New Right's main competitor. One, already emerging, is a revival of an older working-class left that accepts much of the cultural politics of the nationalists. Another is a traditionalist

conservatism that accepts much of the New Right's anti-woke cultural agenda while not being as keen on the nationalism.

The most likely rival pole is classical liberal cosmopolitanism. For complete transparency, this is my own personal position. For it to become politically effective, its advocates have to move beyond the technocratic politics of the current consensus, which has a very narrow electoral appeal, and have to actually address the debates that are central to the new alignment. This would not mean conceding ground on those issues. If anything, we should recognize and state the liberal position on them more clearly.

This politics would make a positive, principled case for pluralism, multiculturalism, and migration (as opposed to economic-efficiency-based arguments) and make clear their connections to such widely shared liberal ideals as personal autonomy, freedom of movement, and pluralism of lifestyles and values. It would also point out how controls on migration and trade inevitably mean restrictions on the personal liberties of citizens.

This politics would be pro-market on economics but would reject the neoliberal turn toward technocracy and artificial markets that took off after 1990. The emphasis would be on spontaneous voluntarism and decentralized, polycentric orders, on the lines explored by the late political economists Elinor and Vincent Ostrom. As a matter of politics and principle, it would also be more egalitarian. That does not necessarily mean support for extensive redistribution via state transfers. More likely, it would mean a universal "floor" of guaranteed access to essential goods—or an effort to make income distribution more equal to start with, before taxation, through institutional reform.

If this does become one of the two main poles of the new alignment, then politics will have reverted to its 19th century form, when it was a contest between liberal and anti-liberal forces.

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