



POLICY BRIEF

Mutations of the left in Western Europe

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Western Europe's social democrats have taken a battering over the past two decades, leading to the rise of a new generation of parties that is upending the continent's political order.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From a strong position in Europe at the end of the 1990s, social democracy has had a rough two decades. Established center-left parties across Europe have lost ground, a development that has not only benefited the right, but also strengthened alternatives on the broader left, from radicals like U.K. Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn to centrists like French President Emmanuel Macron and experimenters like Italy's Five Star Movement and Spain's Podemos.

This paper examines how the challenges of globalization, identity, democracy, and the governance of the European Union have weakened social democratic political parties over the past 20 years. It then classifies the political mutations of the European left based on radical versus mainstream ideology and experimental versus traditional methods, thereby creating four categories: the

Established Left, the Radical Left, the Experimental Left, and the Extreme Center. Lastly, it considers the implications of a European left in flux for trans-Atlantic relations and recommends greater engagement with the European left by both the U.S. government and the American left.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy in Western Europe is in a state of deep upheaval, as political party systems in many countries are increasingly disrupted by the collapse of mainstream parties and the emergence of new, populist forces, some of them deeply illiberal. One important part of the picture is the weakened position of the classic post-war political forces of the center-left. From a strong position in Europe at the end of the 1990s—when center-left parties led governments in Britain, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands, driving a pivotal period for European integration—social democracy has had a rough two

decades. Today, only three of the countries that have been part of the European Union since the 1990s are led by center-left prime ministers (Portugal, Spain, and Sweden), with Greece's Alexis Tsipras further left, and the decline benefitting mostly center-right liberals rather than conservatives.¹

Yet, a closer look also shows that while established center-left parties may be running low on gas, ferment and experimentation in the broader left makes the picture more complex. In France, President François Hollande of the Socialist Party (PS) was so unpopular that he did not seek re-election in 2017, but was replaced by his former economy minister, Emmanuel Macron, who won a strong parliamentary majority on a radically centrist and pro-European Union platform. In Germany, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) achieved a historic low result in the 2017 elections, but remained in government as junior partner to a weakened Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) for the third time in four parliamentary terms, still shaping policy. In the United Kingdom, far-left backbencher Jeremy Corbyn shocked a tired Labour Party by winning its leadership in 2015, nearly ousted Prime Minister Theresa May in the June 2017 snap elections, and has a shot at winning the next election. In Italy, the center-left Democratic Party (PD) fell to its worst result ever in the March 2018 election after five years in power that saw the rise and fall of the ambitious Prime Minister Matteo Renzi. However, the ideologically ambiguous populist Five Star Movement (M5S) won the most votes on a platform including universal basic income, before forming a coalition government with the far-right League. In Spain, the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE) forced out center-right Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy in a vote of no confidence in June 2018, with the support of the left-wing populist party Podemos and regional parties, to form a minority government.

What is happening to the European left is a profound reconfiguration of the political balance. Established center-left parties have lost ground all over Europe due to inadequate answers to voters' needs and

concerns on the economic, identity, democratic, and European fronts. Yet, this evolution has not only benefited the right, it has also strengthened alternatives and experimenters on the left side of the political spectrum, from radicals to centrists.

The paper focuses on the Western European left, given that the challenges faced by left-wing parties in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe are different in significant ways. Obviously, general remarks made here do not all apply to every single Western European country, but these countries are affected by similar trends, which makes comparison enlightening. The first part of this paper will explain how four macro challenges to European democracies have weakened center-left parties. The second part will look at new political offers on the left, identifying their various policy and methodological offers. The final part will briefly consider the geopolitical ramifications of a European left in flux, and provide recommendations.

HOW SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES LOST GROUND IN EUROPE: FOUR CHALLENGES

In the past 20 years, center-left social democratic parties, which had been the dominant voices on the Western European left since the fall of communism, have been profoundly shaken by four challenges to their core ideology and internal practices. First, accelerating economic and financial globalization weakened the post-World War II model of the welfare state. Second, increasing demographic diversity accompanied by a resurgence of religion in the public sphere (Islam in particular) prompted cultural stress and sharp debates over immigration and national identity. Third, demands for individual empowerment and the weakening of collective bargaining mechanisms transformed democratic politics. Fourth, inadequate responses by the European Union to the challenges of unregulated globalization, shifting identities, and democratic deficits, combined with painful austerity measures after the 2008 financial crisis, have fomented resentment against Brussels and the European institutions.

All four of these challenges have disproportionately affected parties of the left, for all four came in contradiction with social democracy, which aims to tame capitalism and preserve democracy through state protection of welfare, and has been paired with a commitment to the European project. Acquiescence therefore eroded the identity and sense of direction of the left.

The globalization challenge

During the roughly three decades from the end of World War II to 1973, known in France as the *Trente Glorieuses*, the post-war European order of a “capitalism tempered and limited by the power of the democratic state” generated high growth, widespread prosperity, and decreasing inequalities.² It also resulted in a strong political center where mainstream parties of left and right protected the main accomplishments of the order.

Yet, after the oil shocks of the 1970s, a new generation of political leaders initiated a cycle of neoliberalism, deregulation, and privatizations. Having won some of the most crucial political battles on the social and societal front,³ center-left parties accepted the rightward shift on economic policy, opting to protect their political positions and mitigate the outcomes of the changed game without changing the rules. Center-left leaders like Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder joined in the dismantling of the welfare state.

For the past 20 years, this phenomenon has only accelerated. Globalization and finance-driven capitalism, augmented by the tech revolution, weakened the democratic state in favor of the private sector, which generates enough growth that center-left parties have been reluctant to constrain it. Empowering individuals, a globalized and digitalized capitalism had a dramatic impact on labor markets in Europe, with manufacturing jobs disappearing en masse, and challenged the traditional leftist idea of rectifying inequalities through fiscal redistribution. Little by little, center-left parties have taken a path of “partisan reconversion” from a Keynesian social-democratic orientation to a market social-democratic orientation.⁴

The Great Recession added even more stress to the contradictions of “market social-democratic” parties. Even when parties of the left ran protest campaigns, once in power, more often than not they were drawn by “responsibility” into supply-side economics in direct contradiction with their campaign promises. Hollande, who claimed during his presidential campaign that “the enemy was international finance” and envisioned a 75 percent tax on annual earnings above 1 million euros, adopted trickle-down policies after 2014, lowering corporate taxes and public spending. Those serving in coalition governments with the right faced even more difficulty carrying out their own promises. The Dutch Labor party (PvdA) suffered a historic collapse in 2017, blamed for selling out their left-wing beliefs in government as the junior partner to pro-austerity conservatives.

Failing to draw a coherent and consistent line connecting campaigning and governing, the left lost credibility and became increasingly unpopular. Internal factions of discontent, incapable of taking over established parties, seceded or sabotaged their parties’ electoral chances. In France, Socialist discontent over Hollande’s economic path led to the creation of the *Frondeurs* (rebels) faction, which ended up defeating the party establishment in the primary before a dismal fifth-place finish in the general election. Instead, Socialist voters preferred the centrist Macron or far-left firebrand Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

Indeed, after losing the working class to the extremes or to abstention in the 1980s and 1990s, center-left parties have started losing the lower middle class to more radical alternatives offering dramatic policy innovations. For example, while the Renzi government instituted a 80 euro monthly bonus for certain categories of citizens, M5S campaigned on a universal basic income of 780 euros a month. The upper middle class, meanwhile, drifts toward centrist or center-right parties—47 percent of those who voted for the Socialist Hollande in 2012 chose the centrist Macron in 2017.⁵

The identity challenge

Western European countries have grown more demographically diverse in recent decades thanks to immigration from beyond the EU, as well as EU citizens' right to move and reside freely within the EU.⁶

Political parties of the left have largely welcomed immigration and tried to play it to their electoral advantage. "Identity politics" or the "politics of recognition"⁷ can succeed in improving rights and representation for minorities, but a decreased focus on tangible economic issues in favor of a fuzzier and less universally appealing celebration of diversity fragments the left and divides it from some of its former supporters. Anguish over jobs competition and a shrinking social safety net, as well as nationalism and xenophobia stoked by populist politicians and agitators, have focused the ire of many in the European working class on immigrant communities, and in particular the growing and visible Muslim minority.

Meanwhile, issues around Islam's place in Europe have been at least as divisive on the left as on the right. Two traditions of political philosophy have clashed with each other: The heirs to Marxism and anti-clericalism remain dedicated to strict secularism, while a multicultural left with postcolonial influences is more comfortable in accommodating religious preferences. Muslim minorities constitute a pool of potential voters for the left, but so far, parties of the left have adopted inadequate strategies for integrating these citizens into their political movements: either attracting progressives with some limited symbolic inclusion of Muslim political figures, or courting Muslim traditionalists in ethno-religious enclaves to maximize vote gains.⁸ Divisions are particularly acute in France where hard secularists, such as the *Comité Laïcité République*, fight against the anti-racist left, such as *Les Indigènes de la République*, with the former accused of Islamophobia and the latter of "Islamism."

Over the past 20 years, the issue has re-surfaced periodically. The divisions sharpened as diversity and immigration became conflated in the minds of many with religious extremism and terrorism. In the Netherlands, the murders of far-right politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002 and filmmaker Theo Van Gogh in 2004, and the political career of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a controversial Somali-born critic of Islam, deepened the Dutch left's divide between secularists and multiculturalists.⁹ In 2005-06, the publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad by a Danish newspaper set off a cycle of protests from Muslims in Europe and worldwide, decisions from newspapers to print or not print the cartoons, and broader arguments about the balance between free speech and tolerance. Somewhat camouflaged behind the euro crisis and the debt crisis at the beginning of this decade, the identity challenge roared back in full force in 2015 with the refugee crisis, the territorial and ideological expansion of ISIS, and a series of gruesome terrorist attacks (including one against French hard-secular satire magazine *Charlie Hebdo*) that left hundreds dead.

Divisions over religion and secularism led to incoherence and open splits inside left-wing parties. In the 2017 French Socialist presidential primaries, hardline secularist Prime Minister Manuel Valls was defeated amidst bitter debate over Valls' proposal to strip terrorists of citizenship (*déchéance de nationalité*), following the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, revealing the uneasiness of French Socialists with these types of measures. In an alternative strategy, the German Left Party's Sahra Wagenknecht has attacked Merkel from the right on immigration and security in an effort to attract voters tempted by the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).¹⁰

The democracy challenge

Across the Western world, democratic politics have evolved profoundly over the past 50 years. A key trend has been the empowerment of the individual and the weakening of collective bargaining

mechanisms, as political party and trade union power have declined. This political disintermediation has left the individual exposed to the tyranny of the powerful and the voter vulnerable to the temptations of populism. The internet revolution has reinforced direct contact between politicians and individuals and thus the personalization of politics.¹¹ In many ways, the power of social classes has been boiled down to their electoral behavior—rather than strikes, demonstrations, or bargaining power—which can be channeled and manipulated through social networks, rendering electoral mood swings more pronounced.

As a consequence of the passage from “the democracy of representation to the democracy of opinion,”¹² the electorate has become more individualistic, more polarized, more skeptical, less prone to consensus, and more prone to radicalism. Trust in institutions has eroded,¹³ trade unions and many political parties have lost massive numbers of members, and abstention has increased to record levels. This transformation of politics has affected everyone, and the rise of populist parties is there to prove it—but the evolution might have been more fatal to the left because popular participation, consensus-building, and collective action are its building blocks.

Faced with this reality, politicians have often tried to offer direct democracy remedies. The Brexit vote is an example of the increased reliance on referendums to settle political differences, favoring the “will of the people” over the mediated decisionmaking of the parliamentary system.¹⁴ Referendums, however, offer a fantastic opportunity for voters to say no to their leaders, and they often take advantage. The failure of a constitutional reform referendum knocked Renzi out of power in December 2016, months after the Brexit vote ousted British Prime Minister David Cameron. When disappointed with the results, politicians who survive in power often choose to disregard the people’s will (as with the 2005 Dutch and French referendums on the EU constitution or Syriza’s 2015

bailout referendum in Greece), further weakening their credibility. Confronted with economic crises and the constraints of globalized financial capitalism, the ruling class has only increased its tendency to dismiss voters’ preferences, choosing to rely on technocracy and expertise. Frustration and powerlessness has often led citizens to take to the streets, as in the Occupy, *Indignados*, *Geração à rasca*,¹⁵ or *Nuit Debout* movements,¹⁶ or go down the path of disruptive, or even violent, protests, such as the undefined *Gilets Jaunes* (Yellow Vests) movement confronting Macron.¹⁷

Demand for greater participation in government fueled by anti-oligarchy and anti-elite sentiment has yielded experiments in social mobilization and democratic policymaking. Pirate parties championing e-democracy and copyright reform rose as a political force in several countries earlier this decade.¹⁸ M5S was basically born online, co-founded by an internet entrepreneur, Gianroberto Casaleggio, who launched a signature online platform named after the Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau for movement members to discuss and vote on policy, choose candidates, and even approve the movement’s “contract” with the League.¹⁹ Once in power, the populist Italian coalition created the world’s first government ministry for direct democracy to facilitate citizen’s initiatives and participation.²⁰

Some established parties have also democratized leadership contests and decisionmaking, to unintended consequences. In 2007, Ségolène Royal won the French Socialists’ first-ever presidential primary in an upset thanks to her populist grassroots movement *Désirs d’avenir*. Beginning in 1981, Britain’s Labour Party gave party members and trade unions a say in its leadership contests alongside members of Parliament (MPs) in an “electoral college.” After Ed Miliband beat his brother David in 2010 on the strength of union support despite losing MPs and party members, the party dropped the college for a direct vote by the membership. New members were also allowed to

join for a 3 pound fee. MPs retained a gatekeeper role as nominees needed sufficient parliamentary support to compete, but in 2015, 14 moderate MPs “loaned” Corbyn their votes despite not supporting him, in order to “broaden the debate.” Labour membership more than doubled to more than 500,000, its highest in nearly four decades and four times the size of the Conservative membership, and the “fringe” candidate took over the party in a landslide.²¹

The European Union challenge

While European integration was pioneered by Europe’s Christian democrats and conservatives, social democrats have long embraced the project, and are ultimately defined by it. However, the past three decades have seen the Northern European market-liberal model dominate over the Southern European statist model, an evolution reinforced by the European Monetary Union (EMU), favoring negative integration (taking down trade barriers and building a common market), rather than positive integration (aligning fiscal and social systems).

Under the influence of Germany and other Northern European countries, recovery from the Great Recession in Europe was pursued through austerity rather than stimulus, coming at a high cost to the social safety net. The reigning EU bias toward austere reforms of the welfare state may have its upsides for preserving the currency union, given the unwillingness of key member states to mutualize European debt and international financial markets that punish deviation from business-friendly policy, but it is devastating to the pro-EU left, with little possibility to stimulate consumption and alleviate dwindling purchasing power.²² In order to demonstrate to the eurozone’s austerity hawks their capacity for reform, many member states opted for reforms of the labor markets, often perceived as betraying leftist ideals.²³

As a consequence, it is not surprising that many of the most significant alternative offerings from the left have emerged along the shores of the

Mediterranean since the 2008 global financial crisis. First Hollande in 2012 and then Renzi in 2014 emerged as center-left leaders of major EU member states with healthy democratic mandates pushing back against Germany and its allies in favor of a prioritizing growth over internal devaluation. Both failed to change the conservative fiscal policy consensus. When Greece elected the far-left Syriza in January 2015 and rejected European Commission, European Central Bank, and International Monetary Fund bailout conditions in July, it posed a more direct challenge to the consensus because a potential Greek exit from the eurozone risked the currency itself. Merkel eventually struck a deal with Tsipras, to the dismay of hardliners on the German right, but it was not one widely judged as being favorable to Syriza, whose challenge was ultimately “small, weak, and opposed by powerful enemies.”²⁴

The European Union has also been widely criticized as out of touch, undemocratic, and disrespecting of local preferences. The imposition of mandatory refugee quotas has been forcefully rejected by several member states. Participation in European elections has fallen continuously despite efforts to empower the European Parliament vis-à-vis the other EU institutions.²⁵

Given its submission to the stubborn realities of the EU, the established parties of the center-left have left a gap in the political market for a more antagonistic approach. This space has been seized by the far right, but also by more radical and experimental offers on the left.

POLITICAL MUTATIONS OF THE LEFT: FOUR CATEGORIES

New political parties and leaders have emerged on the European left in the past 20 years as a result of electorates looking for alternatives amidst social and economic upheaval.²⁶ Although often presented along a left-right political continuum, these leftist forces are better understood when classified by ideology and methods, along two scales: radical

vs. mainstream ideology, and experimental vs. traditional methods. It creates four categories of leftist parties, which allows us to better understand the mutations at work on the European left.

The largest category is the **Established Left (mainstream ideology/traditional methods)**. The Established Left is an ensemble of center-left parties with governing experience on the national level. Established Left parties have long abandoned their revolutionary roots for a reformist approach to government, converting from Keynesian policies to market policies and evoking a “responsibility to govern” to justify the abandonment of leftist ideals.²⁷ This has resulted in some cases in struggles over ideological credibility, especially with the working class, and the tarnish of a history of corruption. The Established Left includes long-tenured parties like Germany’s SPD, the French Socialist Party, the British Labour Party (at least until Corbyn’s takeover), Spain’s PSOE, the Dutch Labor Party, and the Swedish Social Democrats, as well as younger groupings such as Italy’s Democratic Party (formed from a merger in 2007). Even when they have lost power at the national level, Established Left parties often retain local strongholds at the regional or municipal levels, and still represent the official voice of opposition in the eyes of the public. Some smaller parties, such as Germany’s Green Party and France’s Parti Radical de Gauche, also fit in the Established Left as their enduring presence in the political arena, or their experiences as junior coalition partners, makes them fundamentally part of the establishment.²⁸ Established Left parties have suffered most from the crisis of the left in Europe. They are in a state of reassessment of the fundamentals of their ideology, and are looking for a new ideological offering—some focusing on social justice, others on class conflict, others on environmental and climate justice.

Another category is the **Radical Left (radical ideology/traditional methods)**. Similar to the Established Left, Radical Left parties are traditional in their political methods, with pyramidal

organizational structures and strongly defined ideological lines. However, they hold radical views on key social, economic, and foreign policy issues, and defend revolutionary political platforms. Heirs to communist, Marxist, and socialist movements, Radical Left parties take a hostile position toward market capitalism and financial globalization, oppose free trade and weapons exports, and nourish a gnawing aversion to the EU in its present form. They criticize both center-left and center-right parties for their perceived oligarchic and elite biases, often compete with the far right for voters, and rarely seek compromise to win power. Examples include Mélenchon’s La France Insoumise, the German Left Party, and the Dutch Socialist Party. Corbyn is moving the British Labour Party in this direction. Greece’s Syriza is the only such party that has led a European government, and doing so has tamed its most radical tendencies.²⁹

A third category is the **Experimental Left (radical ideology/experimental methods)**. A somewhat new political offering, the Experimental Left explores new modes of voter mobilization and internal party decisionmaking, often combined with radical political platforms, although less defined than those of the Radical Left. Experimental Left forces advocate direct democracy (at least rhetorically) and often portray themselves as movements rather than parties. Process is favored over substance, and policies often have populist undertones, celebrating a people rebelling against an oligarchy. Being anti-establishment is stressed over ideological purity. Many have been inspired by protest movements born in reaction to austerity measures or labor reforms taken in the wake of the Great Recession. The rise of Experimental Left parties can be quick and disconcerting.³⁰ Spain’s Podemos was able to grab 8 percent of the vote in the 2014 European Parliament elections, less than five months after its creation, and has now become Spain’s third-largest party in parliament. Its platform was defined by a “participative” election manifesto, based on ideas coming from local “circles.”³¹ Italy’s M5S started with identifiably anti-establishment and leftist

positions and campaigned in 2018 on universal basic income, but its ideology has long been in flux and in order to govern, it has partnered with Matteo Salvini's fiercely anti-immigration League as well as technocratic ministers for key portfolios such as foreign affairs and the economy.³² In France, the Socialists' quasi-disappearance has led to the emergence of small political offerings like Benoit Hamon's *Génération.s* and Raphaël Glucksmann's *Place Publique*, both very focused on eco-socialism. More recently, the *Gilets Jaunes* movement, with its focus on social and economic justice and direct democracy demands, has clear leftist populist undertones, but also has strong connections to the far right.

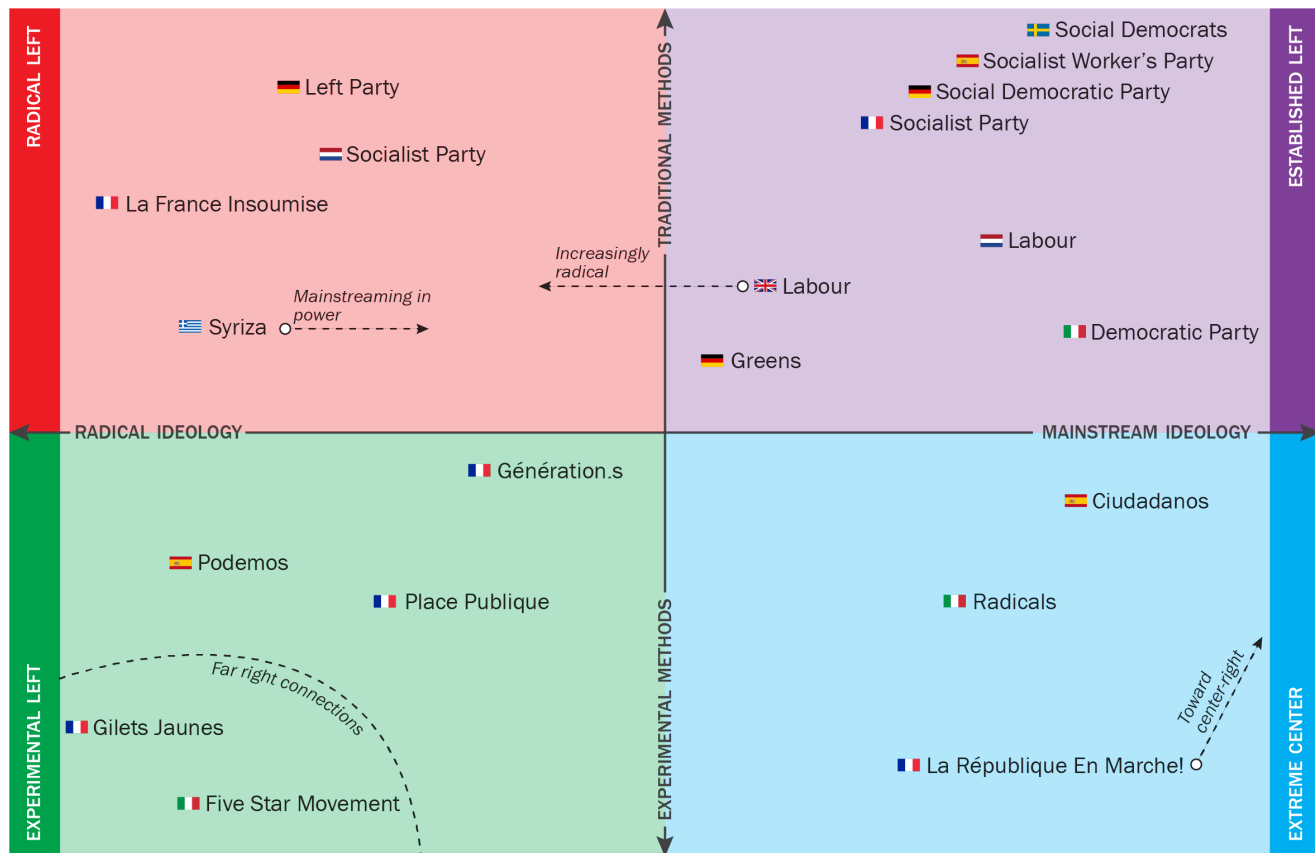
And a fourth category is the **Extreme Center (mainstream ideology/experimental methods)**. Often born out of similar despondency with traditional politics as the Experimental Left, and in a similar quick fashion, Extreme Center parties endorse pragmatist reformist approaches to economic and social challenges and vow to shake up a system that they see as clogged with intermediaries and sectoral interests (such as trade unions, entrenched political parties, and business associations). They defend a program

that is pro-EU, pro-market, and rejects the left-right dichotomy, praising a virtuous "center." Fundamentally rooted in a defense of liberalism, with ambitions to retool the economic and political system to make it more efficient, it appeals to individualism, entrepreneurialism, and multiple layers of identity. Macron is the leading figure of the Extreme Center, despite the change of tone between his experimental center-left campaign and his traditional center-right governance. Macron's *La République En Marche!* campaign started as an experiment with "citizen consultations" in the summer of 2016 to produce a 176-page diagnosis of the country's problems and ran parliamentary candidates from civil society with no prior political experience.³³ Spain's *Ciudadanos*, which originated in Catalonia as an anti-independence movement with the motto "Catalonia is my homeland, Spain is my country, and Europe is our future" also belongs to this camp.³⁴ Unsurprisingly, *La République En Marche* and *Ciudadanos* have sought to create a "progressive" faction for 2019 European Parliament elections.³⁵ Emma Bonino's longer-tenured Italian *Radicals*, which also emphasize economic and cultural liberalism, migrant rights, and "More Europe,"³⁶ could also be placed in this category.

DEMOCRACY & DISORDER

MUTATIONS OF THE LEFT IN WESTERN EUROPE

FIGURE 1. PARTIES OF THE LEFT IN WESTERN EUROPE BY IDEALOGY AND METHODOLOGY



Of course, political actors may incorporate the character of more than one of these four categories, and parties may evolve from one category to another, particularly through the experience of governing. Accordingly, their positions on the economic, identity, democratic, and European fronts may evolve too. For instance, Tsipras' Syriza may have evolved from Radical Left to Established Left since a policy U-turn to keep Greece in the eurozone in the summer of 2015, while some key members left to form new radical parties. Definitely experimental, Podemos has become one of four established major parties in the Spanish parliament and midwived the minority PSOE government, though Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez refused to give it any ministries.

Because of their long political history and their local anchoring, Established Left parties have durability, and might rise again if they can reframe their platforms in order to regain the support of more of the middle and working classes. Radical

Left parties have durability as well but rarely prove able to win power. Experimental Left parties have serious momentum today, although their novelty runs the risk of running out of steam. Extreme Center parties by nature rarely remain in the center as they are defined by their main opposition, right or left.

The main political fight emerging across Europe today is between centrists and populists. Macron has theorized this dichotomy at national and European levels between "progressives" of his own ilk and "nationalists." In Germany, Merkel, a chancellor from the center-right, has come to represent the liberal center, particularly over her decisions in the refugee crisis, and her most frontal political challenge is from the far right. However, this fight leaves out much of the left. Leftist parties that believe firmly in European integration but are also deeply critical of the technocratic, neoliberal evolution of European institutions offer an important

third option. An evolved left able to capture and effectively wield power would strengthen European democracy and governance. Successful European left parties should ally around a positive agenda for EU reforms, pushing for transparency and democratic control at the EU level, as well as policies prioritizing social and environmental justice.

TRANS-ATLANTIC IMPLICATIONS OF A EUROPEAN LEFT IN FLUX

Many outside observers have been blinded by the spectacular advances of the far right and anti-immigrant movements in Europe. While very important, this has overshadowed political mutations on the left that could be just as significant for trans-Atlantic relations and the strength of the Atlantic alliance. The main implication of the weakness of the Western European Established Left for geopolitics and liberal international order is that a group of parties that has (largely) served as champions of a values-based Western foreign policy, and drivers of deeper European integration, will hold power less frequently. A Europe lacking a strong Keynesian social democratic political force is more inclined to nationalism, Fortress Europe immigration policies, and economic policies that further degrade the welfare state and may lead to a less cohesive society.

Meanwhile, the evolution of the European left also poses challenges to regional and global order. Experimental or Radical Left governments are more likely to renew debates over governance of the euro, as occurred with Syriza's election in 2015, although their ability to drive hard bargains supported by populist victories may eventually help assuage tensions. They are also less committed to the EU and the U.S.-led Euro-Atlantic security order than the Established Left. Conversely, an ascendancy of Extreme Center parties could strengthen the power of Brussels, though given Macron's experience in power, it appears that these parties tend to coalesce on the center-right on economics, thus alienating much of the left-of-center electorate.

U.S. experts and policymakers should take the evolving European Left seriously and engage with Radical and Experimental Left parties—which can rise to power with widely different policy outcomes, as Syriza and M5S have shown—via structured or informal channels. Having a better understanding of their ideological platforms and connections will prevent surprises and could help mitigate trans-Atlantic divisions.

Recommendations

U.S. policymakers should engage the European left on Russia. The European Radical Left, with its communist, anti-imperialist, and post-colonial heritage, is historically critical of U.S. foreign (and domestic) policy, and President Trump is particularly unpopular in Europe, with disapproval even stronger on the left.³⁷ Corbyn, Mélenchon, the German Left Party, and prominent M5S MPs, among others, have connections with Moscow and a record of comments critical of NATO and sympathetic toward the Kremlin's positions.³⁸ U.S. policymakers should be cognizant of this challenge at a time when strategic competition with Russia is taking an increasingly ideological character. To the extent possible, they should engage with the European left on Russia and other foreign and security policy issues.

U.S. policymakers should understand the European left's approach to European sovereignty. U.S. policymakers should listen to and try to anticipate the grievances of supporters for emerging movements on the European left, which are not entirely unlike the socio-economic grievances of some of President Trump's supporters. Too often, the Radical Left's criticism of globalization is dismissed as illegitimate, while there is greater sympathy for far-right grievances (over immigration, for example). Offers of moderate protectionism or "European sovereignty"—as Macron has articulated—can be legitimate answers to populist calls for a transformation of integrated Europe's economic structures, and should not be met with

automatic hostility on part of U.S. counterparts.³⁹ Proposed ideas to remedy EU imbalances include a finance minister and budget for the eurozone. Leftist parties and movements have been long-term skeptics of trans-Atlantic trade negotiations, given concerns over social and environmental standards. Relaunching these negotiations without any regard for such concerns would be a mistake. Some of the European left's economic proposals are valuable alternatives to the nationalists' ambitions of European disintegration.

The American left should pursue trans-Atlantic political engagement. Politics are increasingly transnational within the wider Euro-Atlantic sphere. In addition to the transnational alliances within the EU, we have seen Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán endorsing Trump; Barack Obama endorsing Macron; and Trump, his Ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell, and his former advisor Steve Bannon championing right-wing rebellions against a weakening EU liberal-centrist establishment.

However, the left has struggled to articulate a coherent counter-vision to the nationalist international⁴⁰ or even to the neoliberal consensus. By vote share, America's Democratic Party remains the strongest center-left party in the Euro-Atlantic space, winning the national popular vote in six of the past seven presidential elections and in many legislative elections, though weakened by the strong pro-rural tilt of American political geography. Significant political leaders on the American left like Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren are sketching out an internationalist and progressive foreign policy to challenge the nationalist and unilateralist Trump in 2020.⁴¹ Increased engagement and exchanges of ideas between the American and European lefts could strengthen trans-Atlantic ties at a time where they are strained by Trump's bullying approach. At least three areas of common interest should be explored: climate policy, migration and mobility, and anti-disinformation.

REFERENCES

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- 2 Sheri Berman, “The Specter Haunting Europe: The Lost Left,” *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 4 (2016): 71, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/article/specter-haunting-europe-lost-left>.
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- 25 Turnout was 62 percent among nine countries in 1979 and 42.6 percent among 28 countries in 2014. “Results of the 2014 European elections: Turnout,” European Parliament, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/turnout.html>.
- 26 For example, the German Left Party became a national force when the former ruling party of East Germany allied and merged with West German left-wingers disenchanted with Schröder’s government. Mélenchon’s Front de Gauche was born out of the deep divisions inside the left surrounding the 2005 referendum on the EU Constitution. Podemos was born out of the anti-austerity *Indignados* movement following the European debt crisis. Corbyn’s rise occurred amidst a deep rejection of Blairism within the party Blair had led to three consecutive general election victories.
- 27 For example, in 2014, France’s Socialist Party promoted its economic reform package, including corporate tax breaks, as the “Responsibility and Solidarity Pact.” For more on the reconversion of social democratic parties to market policies, see Fabien Escalona, *La reconversion partisane de la social-démocratie européenne*. The German SPD’s January 2018 decision to reverse its declared intent to stay out of another grand coalition government led by Merkel’s CDU was also justified by party leadership in the name of “responsibility” to Germany’s European partners as well as its own voters. Despite vocal opposition from the party’s youth wing, which argued that the SPD should reinvent itself in opposition, the “responsibility” argument prevailed. See Matthew Karnitschnig, “SPD gives green light to ‘grant coalition’ talks,” *Politico*, January 21, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/spd-agrees-to-start-formal-coalition-talks-with-merkel/>.
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29 Germany's Left Party has served in a number of coalition governments with the SPD and sometimes the Greens at the state level, though the SPD has not yet been willing to partner with them on the national level. Since 2014, the Left Party leads the state government in Thuringia in coalition with the SPD and Greens.

30 Their fall can also be quick. Pirate parties captured headlines and a few seats in the European Parliament representing Sweden and Germany beginning in 2009; they won 15 seats in Berlin's state parliament in 2011 with 8.9 percent of the vote. While Pirates have receded as a political force in those countries, they remain a force in Iceland and the Czech Republic, and hold a pair of seats in the parliament of Luxembourg.

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36 Elisabetta Povoledo, "She Won Italians' Hearts. But Can She Win Their Votes?" *The New York Times*, February 9, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/09/world/europe/bonino-italy-election.html>.

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